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DEBONAIR

THE STORY
OF
PERSEPHONE

BY

G. B. STERN

'Gay go up' means
'Gay go down'
the world o'er!

RUDYARD KIPLING

1928
ALFRED·A·KNOPF · NEW YORK

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To Louis Golding

WHO HAS ALWAYS KNOWN

PERSEPHONE

PERSEPHONE, the fair young daughter of Demeter, goddess of the harvest and the fruitful earth, was gathering spring flowers in the Vale of Enna, when the ground was riven asunder, and Pluto, dark monarch of the Underworld, appeared in his chariot drawn by forty black horses, and bore her down to be his bride.

Demeter searched for Persephone everywhere without avail; all that she could find was the girdle that her beloved daughter had dropped when Pluto seized her. In wrath and despair, because she could not follow Persephone down to the netherworld, the mother would not let the earth bear blossom nor fruit until her lost child was restored to her; and mankind would have starved had not Zeus, the Lord of all, commanded Pluto to give up the girl he had stolen. Persephone was restored to her mother, who allowed the corn to sprout again; but because the daughter had eaten seeds of pomegranate while in Hades, across the waters of Lethe, she had to return to her dark husband for six months in every year, coming back to her mother again with the bright flowers of Spring.

CONTENTS

PART ONE: DEMETER

Chapter I. BENEDICITE OMNIA OPERA 3

Chapter II. "I CANNOT SEE—I CANNOT TELL" 17

Chapter III. ANTINOUS 27

Chapter IV. "ONE MUST MAKE A GESTURE" 44

Chapter V. "SET FIRE TO YESTERDAY" 52

Chapter VI. BOILING OIL 63

Chapter VII. THE MOURNING OF DEMETER 69

PART TWO: NETHERWORLD

Chapter I. THE VALE OF ENNA 77

Chapter II. YOUNG PLUTO 91

Chapter III. "THE MAN WITH A LOAD OF WORSHIP" 103

Chapter IV. DUSTY SPARROWS 110

Chapter V. THE PIRATE LAY 117

Chapter VI. CHARON'S FERRY 129

Chapter VII. PERSEPHONE IN HELL 131

Chapter VIII. "DEBONAIR" 145

Chapter IX. "SHE'LL RUN AWAY—" 160

PART THREE: RETURN OF PERSEPHONE

Chapter I. LETHE 163

Chapter II. "A NEAR WAY—A CLEAR WAY" 171

Chapter III. "SHE'S JUST KIND O' WILD" 179
Chapter IV. THE LOST HOUR OF LOVEDAY 196
Chapter V. SI VIEILLESSE SAVAIT! 202
Chapter VI. CAFARD 215

PART FOUR: DEMETER'S DAUGHTER

Chapter I. THE VELVET BETRAYAL 231
Chapter II. FORTY BLACK HORSES 246
Chapter III. CHARLES MEETS CHARLES 262
Chapter IV. PETAL-IN-THE-RIGHT 265
Chapter V. JUNIOR COUNSEL 270
Chapter VI. VÆ VICTIS 279
Chapter VII. THE AGE OF CHIVALRY 290
Chapter VIII. "A RAGAMUFFIN CLUE" 298
Chapter IX. "GAY GO UP" 305

PART ONE: DEMETER

CHAPTER I

BENEDICITE OMNIA OPERA

THE narrow Riviera street of shops was a jig-saw carved into gold blocks and angular shadow, as Laura Trevelyan thrust the sunlight out of her way with her stout little black shape, that was always truculent even with nothing tangible to defy. She did not dawdle, but ever now and then trotted into a shop and gave an order, or asked the price of something, and said: "Too dear!" before listening for the reply. It was characteristic of Mrs. Trevelyan that wherever she went, however small the town, she at once called shops into a circle of personal usefulness: "This is where I can have my comb mended," or: "Here they make my delicious little almond cakes," or: "I've discovered a woman who can get model French hats straight from Paris." But in Porto Rinaldo every shop window was a glowing cave of many romances, where tortoise shell and coral were sold, embroidered silk shawls, jaunty Riviera frocks, parasols, crystallized fruit, flowers, and copper antiques to entice the foreigner.

Mrs. Trevelyan trotted in and out with added importance today, but not bargaining as much as usual, because today was different, and she wanted their friendliness. They knew her very well, for she had stayed in the town for several months already; and besides, they remembered her from last time she came, three years ago. Very few visitors complained as much, or with such confidence, or in an odd sort of way, so companionably, with the same warm human rapidity to forget, and to tell them news, personal news; so the fat little Italian men and the gracious voluble Italian women who served her rather respected her for not behaving, as did their

other customers, like distracted sheep inviting themselves, bleating, to a ravening party.

"You have had my bag for three weeks now," said Mrs. Trevelyan, "and you promised that it should be ready for me if I called two days after I left it!"—But they waited, intuition telling them that she was not truly annoyed about the bag, did not care about the delay. The Signora was happy today—why was it? Unlike the rest of her tribe, she was going to let them enter in and share. And then: "My daughter is coming back today. You remember my daughter? . . . Yes, she is coming today. . . . Yes, of course I missed her, my only daughter. Did you think her pretty? Well, yes, yes . . . I don't know about that. . . . Twenty is very young to marry, you know. We don't in England, not often. . . . Yes, I have noticed that. . . . But your daughters go off in looks so quickly. That's why I make my daughter always carry a parasol when she is with me on the Riviera. . . . Well, yes, she may want one this year. . . ." A different shop now, where they sold stamped leather goods, high-heeled mules, and striped baskets. "Well, yes, I may bring her in tomorrow, if she needs one. She had a parasol from here only two years ago. But young girls are very careless." And, at Victoire's hat shop: "Madame Victoire, I shall want you presently—not now, no—" but she had had to make an excuse for her presence there—"to show me something for the *jeune fille*. . . . You know? Chic, but not startling, to go with white. My daughter is coming home, my only daughter."

And so the exultant pæan ran from shop to shop. Once or twice she tried to stop herself, doubtful of the dignity of thus gossiping out of one's class— "It's different, in Italy. One can't do it at home, of course!"—But these nice tradespeople *did* remember Loveday; really seemed excited that the Signora's loneliness was so soon to be at an end. At least she hoped that they had not observed how lonely she had been. Loveday should not have exposed her to this. . . . An object of pity! Yet they could not have noticed; nobody could associate loneliness with such a brisk, vigilant English lady.

Loneliness . . . wistful and drooping— "There's nothing that droops about me, thank you!" said Mrs. Trevelyan to herself, formidably upright.

So she resisted temptation no longer, but sang her jubilant anthem in nearly every shop where she was known, the length of the street, down, and then up again.

And whenever she met an acquaintance: "My daughter is coming today. Yes, at last. Yes, she *has* been away from her mother a long time, hasn't she? Yes, Loveday, my daughter. Oh, thank you, that *is* kind of you; of course I will bring her to call. It will be nice for her to meet your daughter."

"Daughter!"—The word was so sweet; and sweeter still to be able to use it again happily, and with warm content, instead of with the secret terror of the last few months; with the exasperated solicitude that was aware of Loveday outside and beyond help, where her mother could not reach forth a hand to snatch her back from—

Well, from what? Loveday's mother did not really know. She would never own to herself any possibility apart from the decorous picture of Loveday as she had left her in London, securely housed at such a nice—oh, not exactly hostel for girls; hostels were a little bit common; but a very distinguished kind of hotel, almost; where the matron looked after the girls and made sensible rules about their comings and goings. Loveday went by her mother's arrangement to Freya Leslie's studio every day to learn dancing, so that later on she could teach it professionally. She was a beautiful dancer, but she never wanted to go on the stage. It was queer, but girls nowadays did not want to go on the stage as they did twenty and thirty and forty years ago. Laura Trevelyan herself, as a young girl, had sometimes softly thrilled with the idea. She could have sympathized, had Loveday appealed for a stage career, though naturally she would have forbidden it. But it was impossible to prepare an adequate bed for Loveday's youthful enthusiasms; they were always too unexpected.

"You simply can't get on, on the stage, Mummy, unless you have affairs with fat greasy managers and people. . . ."

Well, but that was for Loveday's mother to say, not for Loveday herself.

Loveday was harder than her mother had ever been.

Mrs. Trevelyan did not stop in front of the florist's window, though it was brilliant and velvety with the early February flowers of the Riviera: mimosa; freesias; anemones; narcissi; tender mauve irises. After she had gone on, however, her steps became irresolute—halted. She went back, fancying that there had been something special about the heaped-up masses of flowers, that had struck her, today, even in passing. What was it? Never until now had they seemed to her so vivid, so lavish and abundant, as though they had been picked, not one by one, but swept up in armfuls; as though they were so lightly prisoned behind glass that at any call they might burst through and fill all the Riviera street, on and up into the hills again, where they grew wild. . . . Mrs. Trevelyan was able to think this, as she never went up into the hills herself. Her way lay straight along from her flat to the narrow street of shops; and perhaps, if she had time. dawdling a few moments on the promenade, with its conventional decoration of palm-trees. But whenever she wrote home, she would familiarly mention all these flowers, mimosa, carnations, roses, as though she were in the habit of gathering them on the slopes around the blue bay. Yet now the desire did stir in her to go up into the hills, quite soon, with Loveday, and gather flowers—watch Loveday gather narcissi. It would be something new for them to do together. "Loveday enjoys new things. We must go soon, before they are all over. Spring begins much earlier here, of course!" And again: "Colds . . . Spring is a very dangerous time." She pulled together her furs, thinking of the peril in the wind that smote the shadowy side of the street. "I shall have to take care with Loveday. She is so careless. . . ."

A careless daughter. And spring—danger—the flowers on the slope of the hills. . . .

Was her uneasiness, deep down under the glazed surface, merely foolish? Merely the struggle to be a shrewd and vigi-

lant father-dragon as well as the "bosomy dragon," which Loveday, laughing, had once called her? Or had there indeed been something ominous in the air, something in the distance, something not quite right, to justify it? Fewer letters, hurriedly scrawled; long gaps between letters; changes of address, not explained at all; irrelevant names that fitted in nowhere with Mrs. Trevelyan's mental landscape of her daughter's existence. Then silence, and silence—and disturbing rumours, flitting through the silence: "I'm quite sure that I heard my sister-in-law say that she had met your daughter on the Continent. No, not last year; only about a fortnight ago. . . . Oh well, she must have made a mistake, then!"

And next, that one card from Loveday, which answered none of her mother's anxious questions. . . .

But you could not sit still, out here in Porto Rinaldo on the Italian Riviera, and *not* ask questions, or you might as well be dead.

And directly Laura Trevelyan applied to her harassed soul the phrase "might-as-well-be-dead," she reached the limit of what she could bear without tears; and was glad to divert her thoughts by turning into her favourite *Salumeria*, where they sold sausages, little cheeses, and *pasta* cut into odd shapes; flasks of oil and flasks of wine; onions and raisins; olives, sardines and tomatoes. Here, too, she was well known; and here she spoke imperiously in that odd mixture of languages that was partly Italian—an Italian entirely in the infinitive, for she did not see the use of learning verbs in more tiresome detail—and partly English, quite good French, and a little Hindustani, left over from the far-off years when her husband's regiment had been stationed in India.

The last flask of Orvieto, she declared, had tasted of paraffin. Yes, there was no doubt about it, paraffin. It must be replaced by another one. . . . Softening, as the proprietor's entreaties, cajoleries, and apologies were wound about and about her anger like long trails of the spaghetti he sold, she ordered an amusing shape of *pasta* called *cravatti*, because they were shaped like little bows, and used to amuse Loveday when

she had stayed here three years ago. . . . "But my little daughter is grown-up, now. You remember my daughter? *Mia figlia?* . . . *Si*, my daughter. She is coming home today. She arrives here tonight. . . . Yes, I may bring her tomorrow," and she smiled happily on the gratified amazement of the owner of the *Salumeria*. Leaving it, she cannoned into that old bore, Colonel Davenport, who promptly invited her to drink a cup of coffee with him at the fashionable *Pasticceria*, Bartolozzi's, next door. Mrs. Trevelyan accepted. He would be interested to hear about Loveday. . . .

"One cannot be too careful with a pretty only daughter," she said, presently, unburdening herself of a fraction of her forebodings, without admitting that they had any grounds beyond her own maternal foolishness. The Colonel became instantly benevolent and gallant, as elderly colonels do when pretty daughters are mentioned, though really all his admiration was for Mrs. Trevelyan. Her very round blue eyes, her tight little rosebud mouth, the complacent rush of her faded hair straight up from the nape to where she arranged it in curls and waves on the crown of her head, the suggestion of top-heaviness—the Colonel knew well that in her day she had been the type of beauty that he and his companions had loved to toast; her very dumpiness made him sentimental; pink and white, with dimples—ah, you can't beat it! And what good sense to let her hair grow grey, to use neither rouge nor lip-salve, only powder; and to dress in black, or black and mauve. He was sure, too, that she did not do slimming exercises morning and evening; he detested women of his own generation who did slimming exercises, especially when these were successful. Laura Trevelyan was very near his ideal. And she was earnestly but vainly trying to turn him into a Catholic, which was just as it should be; for again, he liked ladies to be devout, in moderation.

—And yet, on first meeting her today, he had suffered a slight shock, forgotten now in the conventional bend of their after talk together. But that any tidings so pleasant and com-

monplace as hers— "My daughter is coming out to me"— should be delivered with that—that sort of glory steeping them—?

Good thing, of course, for women to be fond of their young; but to make a song and dance of it—

"There's nothing divine about a pretty girl, I should hope," reflected the Colonel, not quite realizing who or what was divine, or where. . . . But perfectly satisfied, now that the uncomfortable sense of strangeness was over, and he could be his usual self again, across a marble table in the hot coffee-laden atmosphere of the café.

"Good-bye! Good-bye! If I can be of any use—" He raised his hat and strode on, dismissed after the coffee interlude. And Mrs. Trevelyan turned towards the main object of her morning pilgrimage. It led her a little way up the broad mule-track towards the old town, and to the villa of Madame Strada, who had been Katie Robinson before she had married a foreigner.

Laura Trevelyan was usually quite glad not to encounter Madame Strada in the town. Her greatest friend had it in her power to deal her the greatest hurt; Madame Strada had her daughter with her all the time. Her daughter was rather a plain large girl who had a magnificent serve at tennis. Oh, but not to be compared for a second with a mysteriously enchanting possession like Loveday. But—sometimes Loveday did not write for weeks, and Madame Strada would never fail to say cheerfully: "Well, Laura, and have you had a letter from that naughty little daughter of yours? . . . What! Hasn't she written, *again?* How long ago is it? You must really scold her next time you write. Now, don't let yourself get anxious, my dear. I'm sure that it is just that she doesn't think."

That was terribly humiliating for Mrs. Trevelyan. She could better bear a vision of Loveday in peril and darkness, and needing her, than just not thinking. At these times, the pain of a free, swift, laughing Loveday, glad to have shaken off the ob-

ligation of thinking of her mother, pressed so sharply on Mrs. Trevelyan's sense of futility, that she would actually have welcomed in its stead the sudden arrival of a desperate summons: "Come at once. In dreadful trouble. Loveday." As long as *she* were the one to be summoned, she could easily forgive. "In dreadful trouble!"—Only Loveday would never put it like that; she would say: "Going through hell"—Loveday's mother looked down the spiralling circles of what hell might mean: debt, roués, sinister men with entanglements and the worst intentions, jealous wives, divorce-court co-respondents. The lurid glow from the flames flickered on first one and then another of these possibilities, in the dark netherworld of her imagination. Yet an even deeper horror than these, the one unspeakable catastrophe that might happen to any Loveday-away-from-her-mother, would be warmly forgiven, and the sinner comforted, if only the sinner, the little daughter, came running to *her* for shelter, for encircling arms of defence against a world that mocked and howled.

But the world, nowadays, refused to help by howling. The world would not give the mother her chance. It condoned, laughed, shrugged its shoulders: "What *does* it matter?"

How was the mother to be sanctuary under these exasperating new conditions?

And supposing Loveday, if ever in trouble, did not come to her? Supposing, for instance, that she went to Judith instead?

Laura Trevelyan stiffened whenever she thought of Judith Maitland. Her eyes, which had been misty just now with her own imagined tenderness towards an erring daughter, turned into round, light-blue pebbles.

Judith! How dare she!

"How dare—" opened at least half of Mrs. Trevelyan's apostrophes against an impudent world. And Judith, to her mind, was completely unnecessary. Neither her daughter's contemporary—and, naturally, young girls must have friends!—nor a sad-faced elderly lady, to whom she would sometimes graciously lend out Loveday's golden charm. Preposterous, that

Loveday should have a friend who was nearly forty! What companionship could Judith give to a young girl that the girl's own mother could not give her equally well?

Panting a little, as she plodded up the mule-track, she saw once more a picture that summed up for her both her eternal fury against the intruder, Judith, and the perpetual fear that, just because the child was so very wild and beloved, something dark brooded in wait for Loveday. About four years ago. . . . A veranda. . . . The gramophone turned on. . . . Judith, lazily smoking, leaning up against the wall beside the gramophone; Judith's husband, Will Maitland, sea-captain home on leave. . . . All of them watching Loveday sway up and down the room, her bright bobbed hair tossed over her face, then flung right back with the backward arch of her body, chanting fragments of the song:—

"Oh, Limehouse Blues, oh, oh, oh, Limehouse kid,
Going—
The way that—
The rest of them—
Did—"

"No, Loveday, no. I won't have you singing that. My darling —please! I don't like it. It's a terrible song. How dare you? Be quiet, Loveday. I won't have it. Turn that thing off."

. . . Loveday perversely teasing her mother, working up the modern melodrama set to the bizarre rhythm of the blues—girl lost, girl faltering, stumbling near the chasm, going down, down. . . .

". . . Poor broken blossom, nobody's child,
Hunted and tossing, you're just kind o' wild—"

It drifted to Laura like an omen of evil, which she would be powerless to ward off. Unless a young girl had a father and mother to look after her— Or a mother. . . . But Loveday was so impatient of being looked after. Of course, to her, it was quite incredibly funny that Mummy should get so red and excited over the chorus of a popular song.

"Does it well, doesn't she?" Will Maitland nodded with slow

approbation. Mrs. Trevelyan suddenly realized that he admired Loveday—yes, that was it, anybody could see it—she had bewitched him. And all Judith's warm liking for the child, a pretence! The Wife! Laura knew Wives, knew the Way of the Wife—you never could tell where it might lead.

"I'm going home, Loveday. I won't stay if you sing that song—"

And then Judith, understanding that there was terror, and not wholly unreasonable terror, behind Mrs. Trevelyan's crossness, stopped the gramophone in the middle of a bar.

"You *are* being a bit realistic," she said. "It's uncanny. Chuck it now."

And Loveday did chuck it, at once.

Mrs. Trevelyan still shook with rage, when she remembered the officiousness of Judith on that occasion. How dare that traitor Loveday obey the mere casual suggestion from a strange woman, when she ignored the entreaty born of panic, from her own flesh and blood? . . . Supposing this were the omen of a deeper hell, that when "dreadful trouble" should come at last, Judith would be able to help, and the mother left impotent?

But Loveday was returning today. This evening. So why fret any more? It was her fancy, nothing more, which had pictured all these spinning hells revolving round her golden daughter.

The sun poured in a sudden dazzle through an archway into the dark cobbled alley, and into Mrs. Trevelyan's eyes, confusing her for a moment. She wavered, clutched at a stranger, an Italian, and would have fallen had he not sympathetically planted her back again squarely on her ridiculously small feet. And going on, she smiled up at a reassuring image of Loveday, not as a daughter, but as a young son, tall, tall and very strong, who would see to it that in future she need not walk alone up mule-tracks, dependent upon alien passers-by.

Glowing, she confronted her friend, Madame Strada. She and Madame Strada loved one another in the good old-

fashioned feline way that involved quite a lot of strategy and hate, but proved astonishingly durable under stress.

But just today it seemed as though Madame Strada were never going to ask after Loveday. And Laura Trevelyan would not spoil the effect of her news by delivering it without her cue. So she sat, hardly able to listen to her friend's trivial gossip; fidgetting with her hand-bag, bringing into prominence, half opening and shutting it, as though to tantalize the other with the suggestion that it contained a significant letter. . . .

At last Madame Strada asked: "And have you heard from your daughter?"

"Yes, indeed I have. She's arriving tonight."

"What? *Loveday?*"

Mrs. Trevelyan was touched to find that Madame Strada sounded really pleased at the tidings.

"You quite take my breath away! What made her make up her mind so suddenly? You've had a letter, of course?"

This was a question that must be dodged. As a matter of fact, she had heard nothing, not a word, from Loveday, except one nearly illegible postcard, for over five weeks; and then this morning's telegram:

Darling arriving tonight aren't you glad Loveday.

"The doctor says, apparently, that she's been overworking. She *was* engrossed in her dancing, of course; naturally she would never have wanted to be away from me just for enjoyment. But I blame myself a little for not stopping it sooner. Girls are so headlong, and will go to extremes. Look at your Marietta and her tennis! And now the spring. Spring *saps* one so. I'm so glad she had the sense to go to a doctor; and apparently—" a usefully evasive word "—apparently he has said a few months in the South— No, no, I'm not going to let her go back. She doesn't want to. She's going to stay with her mother, now."

Madame Strada put in: "Plenty of milk. . . . I wish the cows were better in Porto Rinaldo. I've spoken about it again

and again. Something in the pasturage . . . artichoke leaves, I believe, the long prickly kind that you see growing, not as good as our nice rich grass."

They discussed for a short while the alternative possibilities of goats' milk. And then Mrs. Trevelyan was brought back again to the topic of Loveday, by Madame Strada's remarking, nearly in a whisper—so unnecessary!

"You don't think she's been at all silly in any way, do you?"

"No," loudly, "certainly I don't. I trust Loveday absolutely. Girls are so much more sensible than they used to be. And then her upbringing. I've seen to it that she knows—Well, my parents kept *me* as though I were a nun. Of course, Loveday *is* innocent," Mrs. Trevelyan added in haste. "Innocence and not ignorance is my motto. Though even then I didn't like leaving her, only I'd promised poor Augusta Penrhu I'd winter with her in the South; she's quite alone; it's dreadful to be alone. Not that I would have left Loveday working in London, for a reason like that; but it was such a disappointment not letting the flat this year."

"You took it for five years, didn't you?"

"Yes, and that was three years ago. I thought I could always let it, in such a good position. English people are ready to pay for south rooms in Porto Rinaldo. Last year and the year before, I had most excellent tenants. But this winter the agents mismanaged it so—I couldn't afford to be left with it empty on my hands. Anyhow, I had to come out, to Go Through the Boxroom."

Madama Strada, too, had had to Go Through the Boxroom. Both had had to Go Through the Boxroom—all down the ages. Feverishly, they compared notes about moth-balls, carpets, furs, and photographs. . . .

Finally: "I think, between ourselves, that Loveday has grown a little bit tired of trying to earn her own living. I thought she would, but I left her alone, saying to myself: 'No, this is not the time to interfere if she doesn't want to be a burden on her mother.' But I shouldn't be at all surprised if she hadn't

jumped at the excuse, when the doctor said she had to leave off. And *I* shall not remind her of all the nonsense she talked eight months ago. I make a rule never to remind people of what they said last time, even if it's quite different next time." Mrs. Trevelyan really believed this of herself. "She knew, bless her, that it gets very gay here in February, during the season and the Carnival festas."

"Now, let me see," said Madame Strada, sympathetically. "Who *is* there?"

"There's Fernando Amorelli—"

"Stefan Chernov—"

"Young Graham-Bethune—"

"He's *much* too young. Count Vardaroff—"

"Oh, my dear, a foreigner!"

"Fernando Amorelli is a foreigner just as much."

"Not just as much," gently; "he's an Italian. Here in Porto Rinaldo, Italians are not foreigners. Vardaroff is a Bulgarian; that's quite different."

"*I* shall call them both foreigners," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

They eventually decided on Fernando Amorelli.

When Mrs. Trevelyan got up to go, she received two warm kisses, one on either cheek, from Madame Strada. She found this habit of foreign embrace disconcerting, for she always forgot to turn the other cheek, both literally and metaphorically, and the second kiss missed its mark. But how sweet of Katie to rejoice with her so heartily. How sweet of all the world, to care that her child was on the way home.

"I'm so very glad Loveday is coming home. You were *so* kind, I shall always remember, when we all had influenza, and they tried to take away our furniture and beds, because Giovanna had quarrelled with the landlord. I shall never get used to these servants. You were wonderful. You deserve a bit of luck."

"Well, but what an odd way of putting it!" thought Mrs. Trevelyan. Surely one could not call such a perfectly natural thing as the return of a daughter to her mother, luck? Or did Madame Strada think—and apprehension quickened again—

did she think that Loveday had drifted so far that her return was indeed a matter of luck? Had she any reason for thinking so? Had she heard anything that Laura Trevelyan herself had not heard? "But I shall know the very first second I set eyes on her," thought Loveday's mother.

CHAPTER II

"I CANNOT SEE—I CANNOT TELL"

ALL the way home from the station to the flat, Loveday had poured out excited torrents of comment and anecdote, punctuated by sudden huggings and kissings, which her mother returned by affectionate squeezes of her daughter's arm, and pats on the knee and shoulder, and stroking Loveday's hand. For they were both of them most happily demonstrative. And quite in the old way Loveday had greeted Mrs. Trevelyan's autocratic attempt to marshal the porters and station-master and cab-drivers into a sort of Delhi Durbar:

"Darling, are you still a Mem-sahib? How sweet you are with them! . . . I wonder you don't get deported from every country! How is Cousin Augusta? Has she got that frowsy cat with her? Is she still a manly one with a briar pipe? Lamb-Bird, it *is* so heavenly to see you again! I must pull your hat forward—anyhow, I'm not quite sure I like that Slav effect. . . ." She darted from one subject to another, like a dragonfly tipsy with sunshine. What did it matter what she was saying? Something about a woman she had met in the train. . . . It was Loveday, Loveday back again!

". . . Wearing the most heavenly fox fur, silver-fox—and she told me that they're so rare because the silver-fox only mates once in a lifetime. Isn't that a wonderful reason? Mummy, wouldn't you *love* to feel, if you could afford it, that the warmth round your neck was such a faithful married warmth? . . . I *do* wish I were a silver vixen—oh, darling, I *do!*" A tremor of wistfulness in Loveday's voice, as though she had suddenly glimpsed a life of wild poetry in the Canadian mountains, a life swift and steadfast, that could never be hers. ". . . And when the National Fur Company or something

slanged the trapper for not getting enough pelts, he cabled back: 'Until these beasts give up their goddamn moral habits, what *can* you expect?'"

"Loveday, I'd much rather you didn't repeat words like that. It's quite different," vaguely, "from a silver-fox."

"Mummy, you weren't listening—it wasn't the fox who cabled, it was the amusing one I met in the train. No—I mean the fur-trapper. I *do* hope I shall meet her again. She left me all tingling and curious about her. . . . I forgot to ask her name, but she was going to get out at Lagnello."

"At *Lagnello?*" A sudden frost sharpened Mrs. Trevelyan's question. "Isn't that where your friend Judith Maitland has her villa? Have you seen her, all this time?"

"Who? Judith? No. . . . She's in the Isle of Wight, I believe, nursing a sick father-in-law. . . ."

Laura sank back relieved. There was a reassuring quality of long duration about an ailing father-in-law in the Isle of Wight. Let Judith stop there!

Loveday, with another of her inconsequent swoops, was relating how the recent acquaintance who had fascinated her in the train always mended her silk stockings with a hair drawn from her sister's head. . . . "But that means taking her sister everywhere, Mummy, as she's shingled herself. I suppose someone else's sister would be just as good? She told me it made a too marvellous invisible darn. . . . And—Mummy, there was a Norseman called Gunnar in a legend, and when he asked his wife for two locks of her long strong golden hair to mend his broken bow with, when he was in sore stress of battle, she remembered that thirty years ago he had slapped her face, so she preferred to see him die rather than pluck out one of her hairs to help him. I can understand, can't you, being grandly vindictive like that? I mean, it was a gesture on a big scale, and that's always worth while, like the silver-fox being faithful; I can't bear things to be small and fiddling. Don't *you* feel, Mummy, that its hardly worth while to have your mate faithful to you for, say, two and a half years, and then to see him slope away with another vixen? Wouldn't you

rather, if it was like that, that he was only yours for a night? I asked the *wagon-lit* man, and he said he'd rather, too!"

"Loveday, I can't possibly imagine how you get so familiar with these people. Especially a *wagon-lit* man."

"Oh, Mummy, it was quite all right. It was before he turned the carriage into a bedroom. We were still in the parlour, so to speak. Nobody can object to that. He was a nice *wagon-lit* man. He told me . . ." and so she rippled on and on, through their arrival at the flat and the Italian servant's voluble greetings, and the first wash and brush before dinner; on and on through the meal—till suddenly she pushed away her stuffed veal and tomatoes with young artichokes, and said she was not hungry, and might she go to bed?

And then Laura Trevelyan's sense of radiant well-being at the actual living presence of Loveday broke down under the shock of hearing Loveday's voice asking if she might go to bed. To bed? Loveday? . . . "But, Mummy, bed's such a waste of time! Let's go in a gondola! Let's go on the lagoon! Let's go to Florian's café! Nobody wants to go to *bed* after a journey!"—And that had been Loveday, two years ago, arriving at Venice after a journey of two days and a night, sitting six in a second-class carriage.

Mrs. Trevelyan, looking at her anxiously, saw that she was thinner, whiter, now that the flush had died down; that her eyelids were languid. Yes . . . and then, with another upward surge of panic, Laura realized that all the girl's babble had been about recent events, and went no further back than her journey out from London to Porto Rinaldo. That, of course, was the old Loveday; the things that had just happened always came tumbling out first and with more vivid stress; and then she would tell you about yesterday and last week, and so on into the really important happenings. That was her way. Only this time she stopped; her interest trailed down; it had become listless after her first burst of narrative.

"What made you come out to me?" Laura Trevelyan asked abruptly. "What made you decide in such a hurry?"

And now she was going to hear. . . .

"Darling, it was the doctor. He went whizzing all over me with his stethoscope, listening-in, and then he pronounced the verdict—no, nothing to be frightened about, Mummy—overwork, and still growing. I'm afraid I am—still growing, I mean. Oh, I forget what he said. I told him I had a coal-black Mammy down South, and he said: 'Go back to her, my child. This English winter is doing you no good. Nerves and what not. We shall soon have you all right when We get you in the sunshine.' It *is* all right, Mummy, really. But I've been feeling all nervy lately!" And a funny sort of twitch rippled across her eyebrows, as though a hand she hated had been for an instant laid on her forehead and lifted again.

. . . She was listening to her own voice grinding like a gramophone which has been left playing in an empty room after the people have all gone. She saw them trooping past, all the figures that had crowded the last few months. They had suddenly become very small and far away.

"So the doctor told me: 'This English weather is doing you no good; you'd better go South' "—Loveday had forgotten that she had already said this.

But Laura Trevelyan did not notice. She was feeling all the relief of Saint Elizabeth, who, when she was asked what was hidden in her basket of bread and meat for the poor, had replied: "Roses," and then, to her amazement, roses, and nothing but roses, had spilt from her basket. For here was the same miracle. Ashamed of knowing so little about her daughter that she could not even answer Madame Strada's questions, she had replied: "Doctors, doctors!"—and now, lo, a doctor had fallen out of the basket!

"Of course you must go to bed," declared Mrs. Trevelyan, becoming all at once practical and tender and cossetting. "I ought not to have let you talk. Mummy will put you to bed herself, and then unpack for you. You'll like that, won't you, lazy child? And all the sun comes into your room in the morning, so you needn't get up till you feel inclined. I'll call Dr. Ravelli in tomorrow, just to satisfy myself about you. You *have* grown, yes, I can see it now. And you're looking very

tired. It's what I have always said: No girls can be trusted without a mother handy." All this while a very languid Loveday stripped off her garments and let them fall in a negligent heap on the floor. "Just as untidy as ever," scolded Mrs. Trevelyan. "Shoulder-straps fastened with safety-pins"; and she chuckled reminiscently; "I expect you remember the day you couldn't find any ribbons and tore off your trunk-straps to pin on to your camisole. Dear, dear, what a slovenly girl! I'd much better lend you a night-gown of mine." Mrs. Trevelyan bustled into her own room and back. "For I'm sure you've lost your keys again. Now, you'll be able to slip into bed, and not have to wait about in your chemise till I get your trunk open. It's so hard to keep these rooms warm, with the paved floors. The spring is dangerous." . . . And with that warning, and with the sight of the slim, naked Loveday standing there shivering, stretching out a hand for the night-gown, rushed back the memory of her darkest fear, that morning, which had remained unspoken, even to herself.

"Loveday—?"

Loveday, suddenly understanding, laughed, and said outright: "Oh no, Mummy, it isn't *that!* Poor darling, were you afraid I was going to spring a little bastard on you?"

"Loveday, how dare you?"

"Bless you, Mummy, I know the way your thoughts run. Darling, honest, nobody does, nowadays! 'Loveday's love-child' would be too marvellously old-fashioned. And *how* I'd hate it. Think of it crying all night! *And* jammy. Or don't we give it jam if it's a bar sin—sinecure? 'Respectable prams have jelly and jams'—"

Mrs. Trevelyan interrupted: "Now look here, Loveday, I want you to promise me this, and I'm quite serious now: if ever you get into trouble—" she used the old-fashioned phrase, for, in spite of Loveday's casual mention of a little bastard, she still could not bring herself to use this horrid, up-to-date description—"if ever you get into trouble, I want you to tell your mother—"

"Meaning you, Mummy?"

"Don't be impertinent! Who else should I mean? I don't like to think of you—" No, this was too vague; and yet she could not explain the eight months' wax and wane of her anxiety any better than this. "I don't like to think of you running around and believing that I would be so angry that you could not come to me. I should be terribly angry, of course," said Mrs. Trevelyan, trying to be a stern parent and a forgiving parent, both together. "But I would stand by you, Loveday, and I hope that I shall not have to do so."

"Oh, Mummy—belonging *does* count!" She stumbled through the choke in her voice, on to her former line of patter: "It's almost a pity that so much clemency should go to waste, just when it happens to be on tap. But just fancy you waiting at the station, in your Slav hat, expecting me to arrive with one of Life's Deeper Experiences in a shawl under my arm!"

"You're talking indecent nonsense," said her mother, severely, but wholly reassured; able to be despotic and unchivalrous when her prophecy about lost keys came true, and they had to call in the servant to burst the lock of the trunk.

Loveday lay, slim as a sword, under the bed-clothes, watching her favourite pepper-tree in a dark spray against the colorless sky.

The lid was thrown back.

A scream of horror from Mrs. Trevelyan. Of course, she had been prepared for untidiness; Loveday was recklessly untidy in everything but the final effect of her appearance, which was always exquisite and well groomed.

But this was more than mere untidiness. There was frenzy in the way possessions had been rolled up and hurled into the space. Helter-skelter they were packed, careless of what became of them, so long as Loveday might knead them down, and slam the lid over them and be ready in time—just in time—

"Loveday!"

"Yes, darling?" innocently, from the pillow.

"Whatever possessed you? Packing? It's chaos. Were you quite mad?" But as no answer came, she was too anxious for

the explanation not to supply it herself: "Leaving things to the last moment, I suppose, as usual?"

"That's it, darling," said Loveday. And again that fugitive blue gleam of agony came into the girl's half-closed eyes.

"It's a disgrace, however tired you were! And there can't have been as much hurry as all that." Mrs. Trevelyan began shaking out the crushed garments.

"Doesn't matter," murmured Loveday. "I need never wear any of them again."

"No, I certainly can't let you go to parties with Madame Strada's daughter, wearing a rag like this."

"My ex-best frock," said Loveday. "It's a model; called 'Absinthe-and-Green-Devils.'"

"Revolting!" said Mrs. Trevelyan, holding the wisp of torn green lace upside down in a bewildered fashion.

"It doesn't go on that way at all. Look—" with a revival of vitality, Loveday sprang out of bed. Her borrowed night-gown slipped off her shoulders, for indeed it was much too wide and bulky for them. She drew on the frock, and, in front of the looking-glass, began to dance, her eyes screwed up tight with laughter, her mouth widely smiling, as she hummed and pattered some grotesque steps.

"Black Bottom, darling. It's only just come in. It's too marvellous. Look!"

Laura Trevelyan looked, shuddered, and closed her eyes. "Get back to bed," was what she said. Then, realizing with a gasp what her daughter was about to do: "Loveday, you *can't* get into bed still wearing that dress!"

"It may as well do as a night-gown, if you don't like it as a frock. It's all torn, anyway. And your Viyella thing is too big for me. I swim about in it like a fish. And it only comes to my knees. It's indecent, Mummy, really it is, to sleep in a night-gown that only comes to one's knees. And think of the lovely dreams I should have—Ooh! All sinister and squirmy, like an aquarium, if I slept in absinthe. And every time I moved and heard it rip—you know how I thrash about—I would imagine it was the octopus pushing a leg through the water."

Mrs. Trevelyan said: "Disgusting!" and "How dare you!" and "Loveday, I absolutely forbid it!" So without further argument Loveday tore off her green lace, put on her mother's night-gown, and returned to bed.

Curiously, Mrs. Trevelyan had felt that this was not so much a wayward rebellious daughter as a daughter giving an imitation of her old rebellious self.

The unpacking went on. "Here's your comb with most of its teeth missing. I hope no one ever came into your bedroom at the hostel and saw it. Here's a bottle of something spilt over everything else. Don't you know yet how to wrap up bottles so that they don't break? What a smell! I don't like you using lotions without consulting me. And what's this?" She unwrapped what looked like a ball of silver paper such as children collect out of sweet-shops. "What a coat! Is it a coat? Loveday, where did you get this coat? It's like a circus performer or a—or a—" she could not quite convey the suggestion of romantic escapade, of braggadocio and unsuitability, which clung to the shining wrap with its high collar of silvery fur.

"Bought it from Freya," said Loveday from the bed, not looking towards the coat. "She had done with it. She ought to have done with it before she did."

"Sheer waste and extravagance! And how could you buy it? I never sent you the money, not for that sort of thing. I let you have twelve pounds a month, and that was all you needed and more than I could afford, with the flat not let. Did you write down everything you spent, as I told you?"

"No, I didn't, Mummy. It would have bored you frightfully, reading pages of 'Bus, tuppence: Kensington,' in my awful handwriting."

"Where is your sponge-bag?"

"Oh, and Mummy," Loveday rushed on, ignoring the sponge-bag. Her tone was husky and a little strained, as though she were bringing out something she had frequently rehearsed, and yet not rehearsed for its present context. "Mummy, I wish you'd let me have some money now. Just to have in my purse,

and not to have to ask you. It's not to spend on anything dreadful. Probably I shan't spend it. I'll keep it, most of it. Only I want to have it. You'll be a sporting one, won't you?" But she did not stretch out her hands palm upwards, imitating a beggar, as she used to do; both her fists were too tightly clenched under the sheets.

Her mother was about to answer mechanically: "No," but some instinct warned her not to. After all, why shouldn't the child have what she wanted? It was her first night at home, and she was looking so wan. Without saying a word she trotted to the adjoining bedroom and fetched her purse.

"You can't want to go shopping tonight," she said, jokingly. "But there you are."

"Oh, *Mummy!*" It came like a cry of relief, absurdly out of proportion to the three hundred-lire notes that her mother had stuffed under her pillow with a brisk: "At any rate you can sleep on them; and I expect, knowing you, that Ceserina will find them mixed up with the bed-clothes tomorrow, and forgotten."

"No, I shan't forget them." Loveday's eyes were full of tears.

A second later she collapsed.

. . . "I'm only tired," was rushed out between the sobs.

Her mother sat patting and cherishing her: "I'm going to get you a big glass of milk. Of course you're nervy, as thin as that. Milk and—" she sank her voice for a thrilling promise—"if you're a good girl and lie quiet and don't cry any more, I'll put a little drop of brandy in it. You'll like that?"

A gleam of irony chased away Loveday's queer fit of crying. "I'd love a spot of brandy," she whispered back.

Laura Trevelyan tiptoed out of the room and into the kitchen. The servant had already cleared up and gone to her lodgings, so that she had to warm the milk herself in the saucepan.

She was altogether happy now. In the next room lay a live, tangible Loveday to whom she could bring tangible glasses of milk; watch her growing stronger, putting on flesh. "My daughter is much too thin." Already Laura Trevelyan, stirring the milk, heard her own solicitous voice saying this to Madame

Strada, to the Colonel, and the man at the *Salumeria*, to Madame Victoire, and those two nice women at the bag-and-tortoiseshell-shop. Yes, but how much more pleasant than to have to say: "My daughter is much too fat." One could go about doubly maternal and happy, fussing over Loveday as she was now, brought down a little from her wonted over-excited, tireless state. And there was nothing more to be apprehensive about. Loveday had been overworking. The doctor had said so. It all fitted in so wonderfully. He had sent her South. She still loved her mother as much as ever. Laura Trevelyan sang, as she poured the milk carefully into a big glass beaker and trotted back to the cupboard to look for the brandy—"Just this once." For she did not want Loveday to get a taste for drink, like some of those dreadful modern girls.

Singing, she carried the tumbler in to her daughter.

CHAPTER III

ANTINOUS

LOVEDAY had been a month in Porto Rinaldo. The tall golden-haired girl in white who always escorted her mother as though she were a careful young squire in charge of a rather obstreperous black parcel, was a well-known figure down the street of Riviera shops. In a brief time she had become popular, exceedingly popular.

"Loveday is the belle of the town. She has all the young men round her, and she doesn't give more of her attention to one than to another. That is what pleases me most," Mrs. Trevelyan remarked to her cousin, Augusta Penrhu.

"My dear, that sort doesn't give; it gets!" was the pungent reply.

Laura Trevelyan at once flamed up in anger: "It's a funny thing about you, Augusta, that when other people are saying nice things, you must always go and say the opposite, just to be different. And please don't refer to my daughter as 'that sort'!"

"I have known your daughter all my life," said Augusta Penrhu, puffing at her pipe, unmoved as the Siamese cat that lay and blinked on the patch of warm tiles where the sun fell through the bleared window.

Miss Penrhu was supposed to have quite a comfortable income; but she always stubbornly selected a back bedroom at a cheap Italian hotel as her winter quarters. She was not a miser, but she had a hermit's indifference towards physical comfort. Also, she liked being left alone, a fact which Loveday appreciated, but not Laura Trevelyan, who thought it was bad for Augusta.

"Augusta is getting crabbed. I must try and be with her

more. I came South to be with her, and she had no right with her heart to take a room so high up. The stairs simply take my breath away. Often, I tell you, Loveday, I have had to sit for quite ten minutes gasping in her room before I could begin to talk at all; and one feels so unsociable, just sitting there not saying anything, like two mummies. It's better for Augusta, because she smokes that disgusting pipe of hers. And then, when I do speak, she snaps at me as though I were a fool. Of course, Augusta and I are very, very attached to each other. We were girls together, so naturally I do sometimes give my opinion about her way of living, and tell her what other people are saying about it, and advise her. I am three years older than Augusta, you know—" Mrs. Trevelyan had never outgrown that mid-Victorian habit of over-estimating the importance of age and time—"so I consider myself entitled to know better; and then she laughs quite rudely. But of course, Loveday, I don't expect you to treat Augusta except with respect and politeness. Call her Cousin Augusta, not Augusta, which I am sure she would not like; remember always to ask her if you can carry anything. . . ."

Loveday punctiliously obeyed the letter of these injunctions, if not the spirit; said: *Cousin* Augusta, with the politest deference; refilled Cousin Augusta's pipe; carried the cat, if required; and kept the old lady cheerful by telling her stories that produced hoarse screams of unspinsterish laughter, and a return joke and a prod in the ribs, whenever Mrs. Trevelyan was not present. All unaware, the latter now took considerable pains in impressing on Miss Penrhu how immense was the improvement in Loveday since her return to Porto Rinaldo:

"She *is* much more docile and obedient," related Laura. "I never have to say a thing twice, now. And she doesn't have those fantastic ideas any more that used to be so upsetting, turning night into day, and tearing about and defying me with a lot of nonsense about living her own life. Nowadays she leads her mother's life"—which was true—"and I lead

hers"—which wasn't!—"and we are very happy indeed."

It was a fact that never before had Loveday been so acquiescent and submissive. To Mrs. Trevelyan she was like a dream of a young daughter: changeless, passionless, innocent. There seemed no reason why this quiet ecstasy of possession should not go on for ever. At first Laura had been wary in her despotism, fearful that her swallow might swoop once against the blue sky and then skim back to the cool grey north, if she imposed too many restrictions and commands. But she gained in temerity with every unexpected surrender from Loveday. And now she was plump with victory.

Every day lived together by mother and daughter was on a tiny sunlit scale; but to Laura Trevelyan it was big enough to cover the world. In the morning they went down together to the street of Riviera shops. There were always little commissions to do; small matters of toilet, hair-waving and manicure, to adjust; white clothes to buy for Loveday. Mrs. Trevelyan could not afford to spend much, but the child knew how to put on her clothes; how to achieve the exact tilt and angle of the final silhouette. Not another girl in Porto Rinaldo could compare with her. Queer, that out of such a welter of schoolgirl untidiness as her bedroom should emerge this twentieth-century dandy, this perfect débutante.

After the shops: "What about a little treat?" Mrs. Trevelyan would suggest. The little treat was coffee and cakes at Bartolozzi's. There they met the rest of Porto Rinaldo society. Loveday's manners were of almost alarming *savoir faire* with her own generation; but with an older generation she was deferential, eager to please, eager to learn; yet she would make them feel delightfully that it was they who were pleasing and entertaining and that she was preferring them all the time to the company of her contemporaries.

"Loveday is so vivacious," said Loveday's proudly complacent mother; "just as I was at her age."

She had no need to complain bitterly, like most parents: "You can afford to be amusing to strangers, of course, and

only dull when you are at home!"—for Loveday's vitality did not halt abruptly when it reached her own mother, but rushed all over her, like a rejuvenating flame, sparkling and crackling. Laura Trevelyan did not realize that she was being thoroughly pampered. She thought her Elysium was eternal, and risked it every moment by some fresh autocracy.

After their one-o'clock dinner they rested; and then went off to saunter on the Promenade; and perhaps to the Casino or to one of the big hotels for tea; or they paid calls, sitting side by side in a hired open carriage; and sometimes they were invited to private tea-parties, all very cosmopolitan; and in the evening were more parties to which Loveday was allowed to go, heavily chaperoned by either her mother or Signora Strada or Princess Zommlohe. "And you must go directly they are ready to leave, Loveday. No fuss about stopping on alone till the ball is over, and then being brought home by strange men in their cars. I don't care about it. I'm not going to let you get yourself talked about like four years ago."

"No, Mummy, darling—I mean yes," said Loveday, meekly. And with a quick dive in another direction, to escape any further reminiscences of four years ago, she pleaded: "Of course, on my birthday, Mummy dear, it would be different? I mean, you wouldn't object if Nando gave me a birthday party and we kept it up rather late? You see, it just happens to be on the same night as the first carnival supper at the Grand Palace Hotel."

"Has he offered?" said Laura, suspiciously; "I won't have you *asking* for parties, Loveday. It makes it very difficult for him to refuse."

"Oh, Mummy, how *quee!* As if I'd ever do such a thing!" Loveday was profoundly shocked at her mother. "Of course it was Nando's own idea, and he's such a rich one, you know, it won't hurt him a bit. In fact, it's marvellously nice of me to be twenty-one next week to give him an excuse to whizz around and give parties!""

"He should have given his invitation in my presence. Fer-

nando knows perfectly well that it's not correct to invite me through you."

"Lamb-Bird, he's writing to you, all formal and pompous and quite terribly pew!"

"Does that mean 'pure?' I don't care for the slang you use, at all. And 'pew' is almost a religious word!"

"But I don't arrive more than half-way to religion when I call it 'pew,' darling. Which makes it so much easier for me. And for Nando, too. We can't expect his letter to you to be all-the-way religious, can we?"

"I won't have things talked about by you two, behind my back."

But all these objections were merely raised by Mrs. Trevelyan to cover her exultation; for really it did look very significant that this eligible Fernando Amorelli should actually be giving a party in Loveday's honour, and had especially invited Loveday's mother. It seemed as though a ceremonial offer might follow at any moment.

What Nando had really said to Loveday was: "You 'ave a birthday, Loveday? Give me this pleasure: to make somsing for you on that occasion. We will be a party—just you and me— Yes? A very, very, very small party. It could not be smaller. And all around us a big crowd dancing at the Grand Palace, for it is carnival. And when we get up and dance, they all stop because we dance so much better; and when we sit down and talk, with twenty-one bottles of champagne—because you are twenty-one—then they all get up and dance, because then we need not see. We are alone. And out of that I make a song, and I dedicate it to you, my darling, darling Loveday, because so you inspire me. Yes, has it settled?"

"No," replied Loveday, frankly; "and it won't settle, not a bit, while Lamb-Bird is in Porto Rinaldo. She would think it dreadfully queer for me to have my party alone with you. Indeed, Signor Amorelli," with a relapse into the demurest decorum, "I am quite sure that *Maman* would not dream of it. It is not *convenable.*"

"Your mother is a dragon. She is the most famous dragon in all Italy. She 'ave green and blue scales. I write a song about her, too."

"But you won't give up the party, will you, Nando? Because I'm most enchantingly important on my birthday, and I must be fêted or I shall feel like a drop in the ocean, and that's so depressing. Only you must invite Mummy, too. In fact, I'm not sure that you mustn't make a gesture and invite her first, and not as a sort of obscure afterthought."

So Fernando had given up persuading her; and had said in his light philosophic way: "*Ebbene*, if we can't be two, let us be twenty, thirty, forty," and had proposed a further list of guests, all young, and most of them male. And still Loveday, perhaps to tease him, went on repeating, staid as a clock-work doll: "It is very kind of you, Signor Amorelli; and subject to the approval of *Maman*. . . ."

"Now, see 'ere, Loveday. Why is it that you are so submissive, you, to *Maman?* I 'ave see, I 'ave watch, I 'ave guess, it is not your nature. Look, Loveday, let us be pals together, if only for a second. I tell you; you tell me. I tell you frankly I am so afraid of *Maman* I fall in the street when I see her; I 'ide under a tram; I throw up my arms for mercy. But you, you look at me with your clear eyes, your innocent eyes, Loveday, and you quote *Maman* to me, when I am sure that you never took notice of *Maman* before now. What is it that you do, Loveday? Tell! I am secret, I!"

"*I'm* not. Something guilty begins to prance and curl inside me when I hear a secret. . . . And I think: 'Oo! Lovely! Who shall I tell first?' And then, of course, my top part, public school and playing-the-game and word-of-honour, sits heavily on my prancings, and I pretend they haven't ever been there. But that's why I'm being so bottled-up just now, Nando, so as to keep it all from coming out with a whoosh. I don't trust you more than I trust myself."

" 'Ow you tantalize, Loveday. But see, if I put my 'and 'ere on my heart and give you my word that I am honourable man—?"

"And that's just what *Maman* is wondering about you!" mocked Loveday.

"True, it is true. One day she will ask me my intentions; and what she say when I tell her that intentions I no 'ave?"

"She will say: 'Disgusting! How dare you!' "

"The poor *Maman!*"

And: "Yes—poor Mummy!" echoed Loveday. Her eyes and mouth were serious for a moment.

So WHEN Loveday's twenty-first birthday party had already run its brilliant hour, and the table was littered with little coloured balls and confetti and paper streamers mixed up with what was left of galantine, lobster claws, oyster shells, nectarines, champagne corks, and all the other nonsensical confusion of revelry, there sat Laura Trevelyan, on Amorelli's right hand. On her head was a tall paper cap, fantastically adorned with the signs of the zodiac in magenta and gold—"Well, just for a few minutes, then," she had said graciously, when one of the young men had begged permission to place it there; for she did not want the young people to wish her away, as a blight on the fun.

They drank Loveday's health Highland fashion. For though, oddly enough, not a Scotsman was present, nor Englishman, nor Irishman, one of the Russians had heard a rumor that thus a health should fitly be drunk, standing on chairs, a foot on the table; glasses upraised, and then, after one draught, slung crashing over the left shoulder. Loveday, aflame with excitement, her blood singing, her voice husky and breathless, had responded eagerly. "Twenty-one" pealed like a promise in her ears; drummed like a threat. She flung her glass with more vehemence than any of the others, and it crashed through the window at the end of the room.

"*Brava,* Loveday!" they cried; "*Hoch!*" "*Bravissimo!*" "*Encore!*" "*Eja!*" "*Skoal!*" "*Prosit!*" and so on, in many languages.

Mrs. Trevelyan smiled indulgently. To be sure, they were making rather too much noise, and the other parties at the

little tables round the dancing-floor had glanced around, startled, not being Highlanders. But there was no harm, no harm at all.

Amorelli's party . . . Darling Loveday. . . . Well, well. . . . She was benign with pride and champagne, and she rounded into more than benignity—she was a goddess, as one by one the young men came up and congratulated her on her so charming, so wonderful, so unique daughter, before they swept off with their partners on to the dancing-floor. It was right and as it should be that they recognized her as the fount, as the source, as the origin. . . .

. . . As the mother.

Loveday might enchant them; but not until this moment had it been sufficiently acknowledged that, but for Laura Trevelyan, there would have been no Loveday.

"Madame, I do congratulate you, but indeed I do. She is irresistible, *et en tous cas, je ne tiens pas à la résistance, moi!*"

"She is like a tall lily."

"She is like a necklace of twenty-one pearls."

"Signora, you 'ave given us a lyric masterpiece. How happy you must be tonight."

"Kind of you!" . . . "Thank you!" . . . "Yes, indeed!" . . . "Oh, but you will turn my little girl's head!" . . . "We can't have her spoilt, you know!" . . . "Thank you, thank you very much, dear Monsieur Chernov." . . . "Yes, she's always been such a comfort, my Loveday. Never an hour's anxiety. . . ." And what a delightful way they had of putting things, these foreigners; so graceful, so much more fluent than the English. Laura remembered, as the waves of compliment still rolled up to her feet and there broke into foam, how a ruddy-cheeked young equestrian from the Midlands, trying once to impress on her something of what he felt for Loveday, had laboriously said: "What I like about Loveday, Mrs. Trevelyan, is that she stands"—what was it?—"stands four-square on her hocks, and looks a man straight between the withers!" Dear Jack Bellingham, of course he had meant well, but how much more attractive, for instance, what Stefan

Chernov had just said, about the necklace of twenty-one pearls.

And then, in her brusque way, Marietta Strada produced a tribute that amazed Mrs. Trevelyan. "Loveday always makes *me* think of Couperin's *Chanson Louis XIII.*"

"So sweet of you, Marietta dear. Are you having a nice time yourself? Yes? I'm so glad. Go and dance, dear."

"I will when I get a partner," answered the girl, in her deep booming voice. Her reply, though disconcerting, was not unreasonable, for the incurably sociable Amorelli and two others of his party, in temporary disloyalty, had rushed off to greet friends and chatter with them, all round the room. And four more men were quarrelling as to who should dance with Loveday. What puzzled Mrs. Trevelyan, and caused her to feel guilty, was that Marietta should appear so little jealous of Loveday's slender grace and fire, as to blurt out a sincere and really charming compliment about her. And the nature of the compliment was a surprise, too, from a sporting English girl—not even a man, but a girl!—heavy, slow-witted, "*un peu farouche.*" . . . Who would have expected from Marietta this power of subtle distinction in music, which rejected Dvorák's *Humoreske* (to which Mrs. Trevelyan would have answered: "Yes, yes, thank you. *So* many people have compared Loveday to that!") in favour of Couperin's *Chanson Louis XIII.* Mrs. Trevelyan herself had never heard of the tune!

Princess Zommlohe, the kindest and most tactful old lady in the world, on seeing Marietta's plight, left her own party at the table at the far end of the room, and hobbled across with a white-haired indefatigable, who begged *la Signorina* Strada for the pleasure.

"Yes, I *will* dance. Rather!" quoth Marietta, loudly and full of determination.

The Princess lingered, to talk of Loveday: "Such a colossal success, zat daughter of yours, dear Mrs. Trevelyan. It varms me to vatch her. Such tempera*ment!* Such *stimmung! Ach,* if I but had my old influence in ze Vienna of before-ze-War,

I could haf arranged a brilliant marriage for her. . . . Diplomatic circles. . . . Yes, that is where she would shine like a star, your little Loveday."

"Thank you, Princess. . . . Yes, yes, thank you—" but one must not let these foreign ex-royalties get above themselves, think that no Englishman was good enough!— "I'm not certain, though, if I would have consented. . . . Nowadays when girls are left so free. . . . These *mariages de convenance*. . . . One can't be at all sure, can one, that they will turn out well?"

Princess Zommlohe looked very profound and oracular: "Ze proof of ze pudding is on ze knees of ze gods!" But then she was summoned impatiently by her own guests; and Mrs. Trevelyan was left looking gratified.

Loveday, swaying with her partner in the Charleston, remarked: "Do look at Mummy. She's all heady with champagne and the nice things people are saying about me because this is my birthday. I don't think she ought to be wearing that cap, do you, Mario? It gives her majesty, of course, but somehow— I don't know—one's mother— Snatch it off, Mario, as though it were in horse-play, next time we pass. Kick it into the middle of the floor, and I'll kick it back to you. I don't want Mummy to think she's been looking a perfect ass for the last half-hour!"

Amorelli returned now to the table, with his great friend, a middle-aged supercilious French poet. They sat down, slightly offended that Loveday, not waiting for them, should have been borne off meanwhile by the enterprising Mario.

"She is looking her best tonight, isn't she?" said Mrs. Trevelyan, avid for more incense.

Fernando burst impetuously through his cloud of sulks: "I tell you what she is, Madame, and when I look at 'er, it come to me every time. She is the Riviera spring. No, no, not your English spring. That is different. That is gentle and soft. Primroses in the damp shadow. I 'ave been to England. I 'ave see. But she, Loveday, she come sudden like our spring at the Riviera. She come with a sharp silver wind—cold and cruel

like a sword, and a hot golden sun that you can 'ardly bear. Silver and gold. The boughs of the fig-tree, they are bare and silvery, but already the oranges are bright gold. And up there on the 'ills, the wild narcissi grow, straight and gold, out of the silver pools, out of the shadows of the olive-trees. That is Loveday—the Italian spring."

Mrs. Trevelyan, who highly approved of the spring, beamed on Fernando, and said: "You must remember to repeat that to my cousin; Miss Penrhu, you know."

But the poet, his friend, scoffed at him: "You have one stereotyped metaphor, you romantics. If you see someone young, you say: 'Spring'; if in the prime of life, immediately: 'Summer.' They grow older: 'Autumn,' it occur to you, proudly. And when you see someone white-haired: 'Winter.' For me"—grandiloquently—"the seasons need not exist."

Fernando retorted: "They do not exist for you!"

But, unheeding, the poet continued: "I have watch Miss Loveday, and I tell you, I, what she resemble. You have seen the bust of Antinous? Yes, yes, you know the one I mean. It is in the Museo Vaticano. She is Antinous, she, Loveday."

"She is, isn't she? So kind of you!" from Laura Trevelyan, joining in with a quick bustle of interest. She hoped that Antinous was a perfectly delightful young wood-nymph. In fact, now that she came to think of it, she remembered it from her mythology at school. "Such a pretty legend!"

Amorelli argued stubbornly: "Always you go back to your Grecks. To me she is the Riviera spring—ice-cold and hot—gold and silver—bare branch and fruit together—bewildering, glorious. So 'ard that it 'urt; so soft that you dream. I see nothing of your Antinous. He was not a nice boy."

"Nice! 'Ave I said 'e was nice? *Qu'est-ce que c'est que* nice? You 'ave already become so English, you drag their prudish nonsense into art." They were both of them quarrelling in earnest now, and had completely forgotten Mrs. Trevelyan. "I tell you, look again. Look 'ow her curls grow. . . . You are blind, if you see not that there 'e is, the beautiful boy, the favourite of Hadrian. His sulky mouth, his eyelids sensual, *son*

air d'ennui. . . . C'est le cafard! . . . And how he torment the Emperor! He always ask and ask. 'E take all. 'E is never contented. 'E break his toys. 'E is empty. . . . But so young, so divinely young, that Hadrian, 'e look at 'im and weep. And all he can do when people say: 'Why do you love that cross boy, that cruel boy, that robbing boy?' is to answer in torment: ' 'E is so young!' You go again to Rome, Amorelli, and look at the head from the side. You will see it is the same."

Amorelli flared up angrily: "You get one idea and you fit all into that idea, whether it fit or not, and then you stamp on it and say: '*Ecco*, I am right!' when you are wrong, wrong, wrong, blind, *entêté*, *stupido*, *prepotente!* You think that romance is not artistic when it is not vicious. Me, I reject your Antinous."

"Because you cannot remember, and wish not to show," jeered the poet.

The music ended, and the dancers of their party rushed across the room; flung themselves, exhausted for a moment, into the empty chairs, laughing, chattering, calling for drinks.

Mrs. Trevelyan reached out her hand and took away Loveday's glass of brandy and soda, just in time to prevent its slaking Loveday's thirst. She had not heard her daughter ask for it.

"No, no," she decreed, smiling and shaking her head. "My little daughter doesn't drink spirits. Wine is good for her; an occasional cocktail; champagne on her birthday—well, we must have treats, mustn't we? But I won't have her taking to brandy."

"Oh, *Mother!*" wailed Loveday, in protest; but Mrs. Trevelyan had already drunk Loveday's brandy herself. She very rarely drank brandy, but she was fond of it. Besides, just for a few seconds, she required sustaining. The old fear had thrust at her again. She had intercepted a look between two of the party, when she had said that Loveday did not drink brandy—an odd look, as though they had surprised a sudden flash from Loveday, and echoed it. Why had not she herself thought of looking at Loveday at that moment, instead of

getting the shock obliquely? Laura held on firmly to the half-emptied glass.

The intervals were short between the dances. Already the band was playing again.

"Oh, Loveday—'Sonny'—it is ours. We always dance 'Sonny.'" Fernando swept off with his prize. They were lost in the crush—then they appeared again, easily the best dancers there.

Mrs. Trevelyan was left alone at the table. Snatches of what the bad-tempered poet had said about Loveday returned to plague her. What did he mean? All that nonsense about Hadrian and Antinous merely bewildered her—names that meant nothing. But what did he mean by using phrases like "He always asks and asks," "He takes all," "Empty," "Sensual," "That robbing boy?" How dare he? How dare he, in the same breath as Loveday? Fernando Amorelli should have offered to fight him. They still fought, on the Continent, and especially when a young girl was insulted.

Her anger died down to foreboding. Was there, could there be, the least foundation for his remarks? Why, when he looked at Loveday, did he think of some horrid boy who accepted presents from an elderly man, in a story nobody had ever heard about? "I expect," thought Laura, "that he is in love with her, and she has been rude to him, very rightly, if she cares for Fernando Amorelli. Men are always ready to say black things when they are jealous. I have noticed that." She sat there, soothing herself, a little bit angry at having been left alone once again. Everybody seemed to have forgotten that she was Loveday's mother. Why could it not all go on as it had been during those recent few moments, when with gracious exultation she had, so to speak, swayed to the multitude, with a metaphorical: "Yes, I made her!" People sometimes did the right thing, but they so rarely went on doing it. "Why don't they come back to the table? I call it bad manners. The dance is over." But Fernando and Loveday had anchored at another table. Loveday was talking very fast; she was English in her appearance, but she used her hands for

vivid illustration, like a foreign girl. It was a quaint trick of hers. The men in her group were laughing hilariously, but something in the quality of their laughter did not please Laura Trevelyan. She could not say as usual: "Loveday is so vivacious. So was I at her age."

They appeared almost too well entertained. Ripples of uneasiness crossed her regained tranquillity. Men laughing—it was too—too robust; too . . . she fumbled for a word . . . too smoking-room. Not exactly coarse, but— What could Loveday have said to amuse them in this way? Loveday ought to be more unapproachable. Young girls should be a mystery to young men, but an open book to their mothers. But if Laura Trevelyan had analysed the effect of Loveday, nowadays, she would have seen that it was almost the other way round.

And then again she remembered that look when the brandy and soda was in question. . . . Was there nothing she could *do?* Loveday would be safer married. Married at once, before—before—

Helpless. Always helpless. Was there *nothing* the mother could do? Must girls be allowed to drift . . . ? She was tired of the lax code of nowadays. But here, surely, here on the Continent, she could take action, and still not be behaving erratically or against the modern law? Here in Italy, in the very best circle of cosmopolitans, too, they found themselves in a set which, unlike the fast English Riviera set, still kept to *les convenances;* good old-fashioned habits; chaperoning a girl; asking reasonable questions when a young man paid court to her. . . .

Fate sent Amorelli to come and sit beside her, prompted by Loveday's: "Darling-angel Nando, do go and sit with Mummy during this dance, and keep her amused. She was alone all during the last, and she gave me such a look just now!"

He asked Mrs. Trevelyan: "You 'ave enjoy?" as always, the sweetest of hosts.

"Yes, yes. This party— It was so kind of you, so kind. Look at my Loveday, how she's enjoying herself. Better than anyone here. See how she takes the floor!"

"True, yes, she take it. You do me the greatest compliment to 'ave let me make somsing for you tonight."

Laura Trevelyan had formed her desperate resolution. Perhaps in view of this and that—of one thing and another. . . . Early marriages were sometimes a great success. But he had been in England, knew English girls, and might be influenced by the English habit of long, intimate flirtations that led nowhere. Half ashamed, she yet determined to encourage, and at the same time to enlighten him. "If Loveday hasn't a father, she has at least a mother," she thought.

But it required courage. . . .

"Dear Nando, I could not bear to disappoint Loveday, otherwise—you know how people talk—you are very wise for your age—and especially in a place like this. . . . I wasn't at all sure whether you were giving this party in Loveday's honour. . . . You can imagine, can't you, what people may say?"

"They say I admire her very much," said Fernando, beginning to quake, for he perceived that his hour was come. "It is true. And also I like very much to entertain. All the Amorellis are sociable. That is why we never become artists. We like too much our friends. But to be an artist one must 'ave no friends."

Laura Trevelyan was not to be diverted by this abstruse topic of artists. "Yes, yes, delightful of you. . . . And I said to my cousin Augusta Penrhu," feeling that the implication of a third strengthened her position, "I said: 'My dear Augusta, Signor Amorelli is a man of the world. He knows quite well what he is doing. He knows what people in Porto Rinaldo will say if he gives a party for Loveday on her twenty-first birthday. That proves, doesn't it, that he has counted the cost and doesn't mind?' "

She knew this was outrageous. But—out here. And it might

be Loveday's last chance. The way those men had laughed! . . .

"Oh," quoth Fernando, with the vain wriggle of a fish that seeks to escape from the entangling net. "Oo care these days about gossip? I know you do not care. I know I not care. So let us be happy, darling Mrs. Trevelyan. You and I together will 'ave a little bottle of champagne now, all to ourselves, without the others."

The Charleston had stopped. Was Fernando saved? But it was being frantically applauded. . . . Encored. Fernando sweated heavily. He had come so near salvation. These dancers, they never had enough!

"Oh, but indeed I mind very much about gossip, where it concerns Loveday," quoth Laura, signifying yes to his suggestion of an extra bottle of champagne between them. "Especially in Loveday's case, when I have to be both father and mother to her. I'm very broad-minded in some ways, Nando, but very old-fashioned in others. Loveday used to be so wild—bless her—she's growing up now . . . twenty-one . . . half-child; half-woman. . . ."

Loveday, pausing at this moment to knock out a complicated monogram of steps without moving from the spot where she stood, caught these last words, threw a wicked smile at Fernando, and then danced on.

"Very much more sober than she used to be. . . . I should not be at all surprised if at any moment. . . . Dear Nando—" Laura Trevelyan bent forward and touched his hand. "You must not be afraid of me. . . . I know that all you young men think that all mothers are dragons. But I shall always have a soft spot in my heart for you, Nando."

"This is not real," thought poor Fernando; "it is a nightmare. In a moment I wake up. The question is this: Do I wake up before she ask me my intentions, or after?" But aloud he said gallantly: "But you, Mrs. Trevelyan, you 'ave not a soft place in my heart—you 'ave my heart itself!"

"Now, now, now, now, now!"

Her way of approach had been rendered easy. Fernando saw

it as an avenue of which he had indiscreetly, fatally, thrown open the gates. All this talk of hearts. . . .

Then he realized that the manager of the hotel was bowing to Mrs. Trevelyan, with a message to deliver. "I beg your pardon, Madame. I interrupt the festivity, but they have just telephoned. It is your cousin, I think, from the Albergo dei Cinque Fratelli . . . a sudden attack . . . very seriously ill. . . . Please to come at once, you and your daughter. . . ."

CHAPTER IV

"ONE MUST MAKE A GESTURE"

TO say that Augusta Penrhu lingered on, with influenza and pneumonia, for six weeks before she died, implies an attitude of sweetness and resignation; of words of forgiveness gently uttered; of frail hands feebly lifted to beckon an enemy nearer for what might prove to be a final blessing. So perhaps Miss Penrhu did not linger, in the atmospheric sense of the word.

She elected to die like a miser and a Trappist, never opening her mouth except for an occasional pungent epigram to her cat, or to say: "I won't pay for it!" whatever necessary outlay was in question.

She refused to speak with the hotel proprietress, the waiters, and the chambermaid. As for the English chaplain, he expressed himself so plaintively, after a short visit of consolation to Miss Penrhu, on her morose behaviour, that the rumour ran round Porto Rinaldo that this respectable spinster lady was in league with the devil, who sometimes inhabited the skin of a Siamese cat.

Her only remark to the proprietress was that if she died—with a cackle painful to hear from one so near the brink!—they might sell the cat, who was more valuable than all the trumpery of rent, medicine, and incidental expenses still owing. Considering that the superstitious proprietress of the hotel already believed that the cat was *il diavolo*, her anxiety was not appeased. For if *il diavolo* could be sold for princely sums, these would obviously be Prince of Darkness sums and call down curses on the hotel and everyone in it. Her complaints and weeping threats did not make the burden lighter for Laura Trevelyan.

For it all fell on her. Loyally, intrepidly, she did her duty; nursed Augusta; interviewed the doctors; coped with the proprietress; quelled the insubordination of untipped chambermaids and waiters; and suffered herself to be silently insulted all day long by the refractory Miss Penrhu, of whom it could certainly not be said that nothing in her life became her like the leaving of it.

Laura Trevelyan ceased to be a silly, scheming old woman, pitifully obsessed with the perplexity of a twentieth-century daughter. She showed herself now to be of the sturdy texture and quality from which nineteenth-century heroines were made: a Florence Nightingale; a ministering angel; a plain woman doing her duty and never sparing herself. It did not occur to her that she could do otherwise than nurse Augusta night and day, with all the unpleasant circumstances of nursing, without help and against antagonism.

Loveday admired her mother, but she was not amazed, for she had always said, mixing well her metaphors: "Mummy has fifty times more guts than me, when it comes down to brass tacks." She tried to do her share, but Laura would not allow her to be much in the sick-room: "No, Loveday, I won't have it. It isn't good for you. I can manage perfectly well. No, I'm not a bit tired. I got quite a lot of sleep last night. You run along to the tennis club, and let Marietta Strada teach you how to play. Tell her I said so. No, Loveday, not another word."

So Loveday disconsolately went up to the tennis club, to please her mother; and spent a miserable day there; and Marietta's day was equally miserable, serving soft balls to a half-wit with ten thumbs, of whom incredibly she had said, only a few brief days ago: "She reminds me of Couperin's *Chanson Louis XIII.*"

Mrs. Trevelyan went stoutly back to her duties. She could bear not to have Loveday actually under her eyes, during these long days, while she knew exactly where Loveday could be found, and what she was doing; to be able mentally to account for her, in detail, was such a relief that it was only

now, by contrast, that she became aware of the sinister strain she had endured during those months before Loveday came out to Porto Rinaldo. "I ought to be with her more; but Augusta has no one else—"

Augusta had, strangely enough, three brothers, two sisters-in-law, and actually a mother living in Cornwall; but perhaps she was not popular with them. They argued at first that influenza was not serious; and then they argued that pneumonia was too serious—they could never reach Italy in time. At all events, they made no move to come out and nurse her, and Laura Trevelyan wasted no time lamenting their absence. "They're not here, and that's an end to it," she told herself, trotting about and preparing poultices.

When it was obvious to all that the invalid was sinking and would barely live out the day, she upset the Trevelyans afresh by beginning to talk, and to talk about her Will. With a spasm of imperious energy, at noon, she succeeded in dictating fairly audibly her last simple disposition of property. In the presence of the hotel proprietress, the doctor, the breakfast waiter, and a banished nun who had reappeared to pray, she left all she possessed to Laura Trevelyan. Loveday could not suppress a gasp of excitement, but her mother shook her head, reproving her. Miss Penhru took the pencil and appeared to sign the testament. Then she dropped back into a sort of coma. Crouching on the window-seat, Loveday tried to scold herself out of a growing sense of pleasure that her mother, who had been perfectly wonderful, was going to come into perhaps quite a lot of money. How quee it was. —No, not quee—queer! What a callous one I am! With somebody dying in the room!—How *queer* that everything enormously important to her had scampered away into the background . . . Charles . . . that hell of a time in Petal's flat . . . oh, and Fritz von Tadelheim's fantastic offer. . . . But only Cousin Augusta counted, now; and yet she had not been particularly fond of the old hermit woman. That's just the sort of pull death gave you—when you couldn't make use of it! They say that everything links up; is it true? But it was

absurd to suppose that her unruly past could ever in the slightest way link up with this gloomy scene, in a back room of an Italian hotel, with a dying third cousin. To occupy herself, Loveday tried to achieve some such link, and nearly broke into laughter at a flight of imagination which revealed Fritz von Tadelheim as Augusta's son by an early secret marriage. . . . "You heartless beast!" Loveday again furiously scolded Loveday for her collapse from the right solemnity. How was it Mummy could manage it? . . . There she was, crying away and doing everything right! Even the breakfast waiter was crying; but goodness knows he had detested Cousin Augusta; or was it the evening waiter who detested her, and this one rather liked her, really? Yes, this was the one who in his spare time had done for her that rather lewd drawing of a cabaret girl going up on the cork of a bottle of Asti, with himself in correct "smoking," cutting the wire. It did look grotesque, hanging there above the bed! They ought to have taken it down, but Mummy had said that it would hurt the man's feelings, and that anyhow it was nice to think that somebody in the hotel was really fond of Augusta, even though, poor fellow, he expressed it in such an odd way. Mummy had queer bouts of understanding. She would probably get on well with the waiter because they could both be Catholics together. . . . "There'll be a terrifically pious bout, after this," thought Loveday, foreseeing masses and candles and novenas in full procession and panoply. Mummy would be bound to get on her religious lay, especially now Cousin Augusta had left her money; she would feel so strongly that it was an earthly reward which would need working off, so as not to do her in with Heaven.

. . . How long had they all been sitting round in the half-dark room, staring at the unconscious figure on the bed? Loveday slipped over to her mother, knelt beside her, and whispered: "Mummy, not angry, are you? I can't cry. She'll be dead—I mean, she'll be gone, before night, won't she? I don't want you to have another night looking after her. You're quite worn out. Let me, if she lives, Mummy, do?"

"Certainly not!"—and then Mrs. Trevelyan went forward to speak to the doctor, who promised to come back after sunset; "Though there's nothing more to be done," he said.

"Take that woman away with you. She makes me nervous." Laura Trevelyan indicated the hotel proprietress, who had remained steadily staring at the cat, her fat face mournful and apprehensive. Perhaps she was afraid that, if she left the apartment, her client would die, and Mrs. Trevelyan would fly off in mid-air on the back of the incarnate devil, robbing the hotel of a valuable, if uncomfortable, asset.

The doctor, protesting that he never interfered between ladies, hastily departed.

"Signora," said Mrs. Trevelyan: "*Via! Via! Basta!* Away! *Imshi Allah!* You should be downstairs, attending to your business."

"This *is* my business."

"Thank you, no, not in the least. *Niente* your business. *I* can look after my cousin," retorted Laura Trevelyan.

It was evident that the proprietress had determined to see things out. Mrs. Trevelyan was equally determined that she should not. She tried to think of the Italian for "harpy." A dumpy little figure, bolt upright, with round eyes red from much weeping and little sleep, she stood in the doorway, ordering the woman out of the room. The nun rapidly pattered her beads. Loveday was frightened. But suddenly and respectfully the proprietress of the Cinque Fratelli bowed low, spread her hands, and vanished, intimidated. The little sobbing waiter scuttled downstairs after her, afraid of reproof.

"Mummy," whispered Loveday, after they had waited another two hours, and no visible change had happened to the figure in bed. "Don't be angry if I'm worldly. . . . I wasn't dreaming, was I? She *has* left you all her money?"

"Loveday, I'd much rather you said a prayer for poor Cousin Augusta than talk of these things."

"Oh, Mummy, yes, but do tell me first—"

"She hasn't signed the will," said Laura Trevelyan, calmly.

"But—I saw her."

"She only made some foolish marks on the paper. Nobody could read it as a signature."

"But she'll wake up and try again, won't she? Mummy, if she *wants* you to have her money— Would it be such a bad gesture to ask her to try again? *You* needn't if you'll only let me? Mummy—"

"Loveday, I'm ashamed of you!"

What was the good, Loveday reflected impatiently, of being reverent about someone who was going to die? Why had Cousin Augusta been so slovenly and left everything to the last minute, when she could not even write properly? And Mummy had been such an angel to her. It would make such a difference to Mummy. She might just as well have seen to it last week. The girl was getting thoroughly angry. To her clear-cut notions an unsigned will was melodramatic and Victorian and altogether idiotic. Augusta had wanted Mummy to have the money. She had wanted to make a gesture. Surely it mattered enough to do it completely and heroically? Staring across the dusty gloom of the room towards the piece of paper with a scrawled sentence or two lying on the floor next to the bed, Loveday felt uncontrollably enraged on her mother's behalf; and, at the same time, hated herself for not behaving so well about it as her mother. Lamb-Bird really took the loss of an extra eight hundred a year which might have been hers, in a way that was almost austere in its dignity. "And yet what a fuss she makes, an angry pop-eyed fuss, if I spill something over the table-cloth! Rubbing it in that we're poor and can't afford a fresh cloth every day, and that I'm careless, and worrying her to the grave. Oh—" Loveday caught her breath; her throat tightened—the grave—that cold, earthy word . . . and her scattered thoughts collected pitifully round Cousin Augusta: "Thank God it isn't Mummy. . . ."

Just after the doctor came back, Miss Penrhu became sensible. "The last flicker," he said. But it was a peculiarly animated flicker. Curiously enough, she still remembered the Will; even remembered that she had not signed it legibly. The

doctor suggested that she would want other witnesses. Those who would benefit were useless. Miss Penrhu nodded assent.

"Lawyer," she muttered; "English lawyer." But there was no time to search for an English lawyer. On insular grounds, the doctor suggested that four foreigners might be looked upon as the equivalent of one Briton. He re-summoned the proprietress; the same waiter who had drawn the cabaret girl on the bottle of Asti; and, as the hotel seemed to be empty at the moment, two passers-by; Germans, as it happened; an enormous German, highly respectable, and his enormous wife, the pair encumbered with many shawls, wraps, and rugs, for they had been snatched from a peaceful drive in a hired carriage, and were afraid to leave any of their property outside, in case the driver might steal it.

"Ach!" exclaimed the Germans; "the poor one!" and gazed with interest at the dying woman, lying so uncomfortably on a rickety iron bedstead; at the tall fair girl in white with the haughty mouth. . . . Loveday always looked haughty when she felt frightened, and she was badly frightened now; her heart was thumping; the room was full of mystery, and everyone was twice life-size; and that beastly cat kept on licking its paws—and licked, and licked as though it mattered, first one and then the other. It was horribly cold—no fireplace. . . . How could Mummy have borne this room all these weeks, day after night, and night after day? And now Cousin Augusta had the pencil in her hand, and was striving to write a coherent signature. . . . The one electric light, over in a far corner, was feeble and almost extinct; so the breakfast waiter lit a candle and held it close to the paper, that the woman in bed might see what she was doing. His hand was shaking, and drops of grease fell all over the pillow and over her hair.

"Steady," said the doctor. Oh, blessed, sane doctor! "Steady. Yes, that's it. . . ."

The Germans crowded a little nearer; "Ach!" they commented; "but it vill not do. It is not lechible."

Cousin Augusta, conscious that she had failed, tried yet again, but there was no power in her fingers, and the pencil

kept on slipping. This time it was the proprietress of the Cinque Fratelli who leaned forward over Miss Penrhu's shoulder —shook her head, and scattered out a vehement flood of Italian: "*Impossibile!*" she announced several times, for the second signature was even less clear than the first. She stepped forward, picked up the dropped pencil, and thrust it again at Miss Penrhu, who was by now too exhausted, too near the end of her struggle, to take it.

"Give her cognac," said the male German; "give her brandy. Give her stimulant. *Ja*, perhaps once again . . ."

They were none of them to benefit personally, but they were as excited, as insistent, as the cheering spectators of a race when a runner is near the tape. You could feel the room palpitating with the intense desire of all these strangers. For though the death sweat was bursting into beads on her neck and forehead, though her colour was ghastly and her fingers contracted and twitched spasmodically, yet she *must* sign— *must* sign! Even the doctor—

But then Laura Trevelyan trotted forward from the shadowy alcove behind the bed; took the glass away; motioned that the pencil was to be allowed to lie on the floor. "Leave it alone. I won't have her worried. That is quite enough."

CHAPTER V

"SET FIRE TO YESTERDAY"

LOVEDAY'S secret conviction that her mother was a heroine and a great woman suffered an impossible strain, and broke, during the period following Augusta Penrhu's death. Mrs. Trevelyan was her most tiresome and illogical self, one moment flying into a temper for some utterly trivial cause, and then so depressed that her daughter could not rouse her from lethargy, or, what was worse, from weeping.

Loveday herself was growing restless. The pretty little Riviera comedy of *Maman* and *la jeune fille* had played itself out. She had acquiesced in it because it gave Mummy so much obvious pleasure; and it did not hurt her, because for the time nothing could hurt her, being already numb with hurt. But now, now the summer was near. . . . "Something always happens in the summer," quoth Loveday, trustfully. You must make plans for yourself through the autumn and winter, but summer does its own planning.

". . . Besides, Cousin Augusta is dead now, so what *is* the use of fussing? You did all you could, darling. You have even taken her horrid cat to have secrets with itself all over our nice unmorbid flat. Do cheer up, Lamb-Bird! Let's go over to Nice or somewhere, and live riotously."

But Lamb-Bird wept.

"The nursing has told on her nerves," said the English doctor to Loveday. "We must try to rouse her."

But what really did rouse Mrs. Trevelyan was a lawyer's letter.

She had refused at first to do anything concerning the Will which Miss Penrhu had made in her last moments. Then, when the bills of the past six months began to flow in—the bill for

the funeral expenses, the bill from the proprietress of the Cinque Fratelli, from the doctor, from the chemist, for debts which Miss Penrhu had contracted before her illness—she suggested that Loveday might consult Fernando Amorelli.

"Oh, Nando's fed up with me, for nothing I can remember doing. He tries as hard, lately, *not* to find me wherever I am as he used to the other way round!" Loveday tilted her chin haughtily; and being already tall, her gaze was thus too high to see her mother's blush.

"You might ask Colonel Davenport's opinion, or Madame Strada's," suggested Mrs. Trevelyan, sighing; but she did not succeed in sighing away the secret load on her conscience.

Colonel Davenport and Madame Strada, in their turn, consulted a great many cther people in Porto Rinaldo; and hugely enjoyed themselves.

"This is where we ought to have a man belonging to us," wailed Laura. She was suddenly and sharply feeling the loss of the husband who had died when she was forty-three, and when Loveday, the only child of their middle age, was two years old. A man who does things by magic and tells you not to interfere in matters that do not concern you—how restful that would be, now, in this welter of official transactions. Suspicious of advice, she invented all sorts of fantastic reasons why those who tendered it were not wholly disinterested: "Of course, they are all simply trying to get jobs for their lawyer relations. Be quiet, Loveday, don't argue with me. I know the world, and you don't. You're always ready to trust everybody, as long as it isn't your own mother." And Mrs. Trevelyan wept afresh.

Eventually, however, a lawyer in London was chosen out of the selection offered by the Porto Rinaldo English colony; and a letter was written informing him of the facts of Miss Penrhu's death, and the obligations which must be met. Mrs. Trevelyan enclosed a copy of the Will, with a description of the signing thereof. Another letter told Miss Penrhu's eldest brother the same details, and suggested that he should communicate with Messrs. Gavin, Gray & Gavin, the solicitors in

question. This done, she relapsed into apathy once more, from which she now and again roused herself to ask Loveday how she was getting on with her tennis? And why hers should be the only daughter in Porto Rinaldo who could not play tennis? "You have wasted your time dancing, and nobody dances now," she contended, not very accurately; "and if that Marietta Strada weren't so jealous of you and the way you can wear the clothes she can't, she would have managed to teach you long ago. But nobody tries to do anything for me. I'm used to it, and I would be much better in my grave with poor Augusta." And still, and yet again, Mrs. Trevelyan wept.

She ceased weeping, however, when a letter arrived from the firm of solicitors who represented the brothers and sisters of Augusta Penrhu, announcing that their clients did not propose recognizing the Will made by Miss Penrhu, as she was probably *non compos mentis* at the time; her estate, therefore, unless Mrs. Trevelyan proposed litigation, would go to the next of kin; and if a list of Miss Penrhu's debts were sent to them, they would undertake to satisfy them. It was not a very polite letter, and Laura Trevelyan's first reaction to it was well-bred disgust. She did not want poor Augusta's money, and had not nursed her with any idea of a solid reward. Let it go at that! Once again she ceased to be tiresome, silly, and fussy; and showed instead that dignity which Loveday had so admired in her during the scene of Augusta's death. It did, indeed, hurt her that these people—she had hardly known them, for Augusta, who was by far the eldest, had been her only contemporary—that these people should suppose one could be so vulgar as to nurse a dying friend in the hope of an inheritance. She would be very glad indeed not to touch the money. It was pleasant enough to know that Augusta had desired her to have it. No need for any discussion whatever as to the validity of the Will and its signature. "We're quite happy as we are, aren't we, Loveday? Go up to the tennis club, darling, and call for Marietta on the way. You're looking very white. I don't like to see it. Plenty of fresh air,

exercise, and sunshine are what you want. Run along, run along! You bother me when you sit about the room."

"Mummy, *must* I play any more tennis? I'm quite hopeless at it, you know; Marietta will end—and I don't blame her!—by breaking her racket over my head. Such an inconvenient ambition of yours, to want to see me do Lenglen arabesques all over the court! I can do the arabesques, of course, but nowhere near the ball."

"I have no ambition for my daughter except that she should be well and happy—and good," added Mrs. Trevelyan.

"But I shan't be good if I go on playing tennis. I shall be damn rotten bad. I feel it coming on again."

. . . It was that "again" which twanged the old string of alarm in Laura Trevelyan, after she had chased a rebellious Loveday once more to the tennis-courts. "Again"—what could the child mean by the word "again"? "I feel it coming on—again!"

Nothing. She could mean nothing. She was just talking, rattling on, being disobedient and foolish about her tennis. But Laura could not shake off the premonition that all was not well with her little daughter; that the docile mood which had yielded such a delightful two months when Loveday first came out to England was now over, or nearly over. The beloved was growing bored. At any moment she might want to leave her mother again, out of sight, out of call. . . .

"I can't bear it. What can I do?"

She thought she knew well what Loveday wanted. Loveday wanted amusement, and if she could not get it legitimately, she would go and loot it. Yes, and there was that, too, which Laura had noticed about her daughter's departure up the hill: Loveday was walking like a young buccaneer again; as though she were mischievously ready to encounter hazard, to rob, to plunder, and laughing, to sail away—sail to wherever there was amusement, wherever there were cities to be sacked. The mother did not define quite as definitely as this what she had seen when watching her daughter from the win-

dow. But there had been moments during the last three months when the mere sight of Loveday had fulfilled all her romantic notions of what a daughter should be: Loveday in white . . . Loveday demure . . . Loveday remembering her manners . . . Loveday enjoying innocent little treats; and most of all—most of all, Loveday contented. . . .

Amusement was so expensive. Laura beat one pudgy hand on the other, thinking of the cost, in the same way as a poor lover might, over his extremely luxurious mistress. If only she had more money for Loveday! Loveday had once flashed out the remark, over some matter of a hat which they could not afford, that she thought the three most boring words in the English language were "a limited income." " 'Limited'—oh, Mummy, think of it! Stopped short by a wall you can't see over. Doesn't it give you a picture of lodgings and two dowdy women in rusty black? Let's go out quick and be extravagant, or we shall become like that before we notice it!" And that day, Laura remembered, they had lunched off *pâté de foie gras*, lobster, and champagne; and they had both enjoyed it, and had come home chuckling and impenitent. "Darling Mummy, you are a sport!" . . .

Suddenly Laura Trevelyan decided that she would *not* surrender, over this business of Augusta's Will.

A safe marriage with Fernando? . . . "He's fed up with me!"

But one must try everything. . . .

The money that had been left to her must be quite seven or eight hundred a year. There had been witnesses. Why should those people take it away from her? Why shouldn't she have it—for Loveday, for Loveday?

. . . Laura sat very still, thinking it over; recoiling from the wrangling, the publicity, the unpleasantness which she knew would have to be endured, inevitably, if she were obstinate and clung to her rights; if she wrote rude letters back to their lawyers. It was humiliating to feel that, even if she triumphed, she would, to a certain extent, forfeit a part of her

self-respect. She would never be able to say to herself: "I did my duty, and that was the end of it!"

But never mind. Loveday was getting restless. . . .

The subsequent change in Mrs. Trevelyan was amazing to Loveday, and to everybody who knew her in Porto Rinaldo. Now that she had definitely entered upon a campaign for her inheritance, she ceased to be listless, fretful, worn out. She ceased most certainly to be dignified. She trotted about, furiously truculent, snorting out defiance, as though the hordes of Penrhu were flying before her. After communications like missiles had been hurled between London and Porto Rinaldo, between the opposing firms of solicitors that represented Mrs. Trevelyan and the Penrhu next-of-kin, a legal ambassador arrived unexpectedly from England; and Mrs. Trevelyan, believing him to be from the enemy, at first refused to listen to what he said; and even asserted that people who believed herself and her daughter to be adventuresses were welcome to her hospitality but not to her company . . . before she could be brought to realize by Loveday and the gentleman himself, that he had come on behalf of Messrs. Gavin, Gray & Gavin, in Mrs. Trevelyan's own interests; that he had come to hear their statements, and then to interview the various witnesses, who would all be needed when the case was brought into court, probably early in the autumn. Laura, wildly excited, made her "statement" over and over again; and every time the lawyers' representative turned hopefully to Loveday, interrupted with: "My daughter knows nothing about this. Nothing whatever. And I won't have her brought into it. I know all that is necessary, and if you won't believe me—well, poor Augusta and I went to school together; I'm wearing the ring she gave me, though it's of no value at all, as you may see. And that is her very own cat whom she loved so. I have brought him to have a home with me the rest of his life, though I never did care for cats. . . . Pretty pussy! . . . And our servant has refused several times, though she can hardly expect me or Loveday to do it. And if *that* doesn't convince the judge, I don't know what

will. . . . Be quiet, Loveday. What you are saying is nothing to do with the matter!"

Loveday met Mr. Turner of Messrs. Gavin, Gray & Gavin, next morning by appointment at Bartolozzi's, and there peacefully made her statement.

She really preferred Laura Trevelyan in this animated if unreasonable condition, rather than when she had merely lain about and wept; though she did wish her mother had not become so obsessed with the desire to win the case. Several times a night Loveday was woken by a stout figure in a Viyella nightgown standing in the doorway between their two rooms.

"Loveday, we *shall* win it! Say you think we will! We *must* win. I won't be called an adventuress by anyone. If we lose, we shall be ruined, what with costs, so they tell me. Do you think Saint Anthony or Saint Joseph would be our best saint? Saint Anthony for lost property, you know; but would you call poor Augusta's property lost? We know just where it is. And dear Saint Joseph has always been so kind."

Loveday, believing that if you whirled people off to a different spot, there is always a hope that they will leave their worries behind, again suggested going to Monte Carlo or to Nice for a few days.

"The doctor has advised a change of scene for you, Mummy, and you know the wonderful prices that happen in Monte Carlo at the end of the season. You can get the most marvellous mourning for practically nothing, and it might make all the difference with the judge, you know, later on!"

"Don't be so ridiculous, Loveday. I hope British justice is British justice still, and not likely to be influenced by anything like that."

But all the same, lured by her daughter's deft use of the phrase "end of the season prices," Mrs. Trevelyan consented to the plan.

On the evening before they left, she called out from her room: "Loveday, you had better give me your passport at once, and I'll put it with mine and have it ready. You know

what you are, always hunting for things at the last moment."

There was silence from Loveday's room, then . . . "All right, Mummy," she called back, and wondered if she had managed to keep the fear out of her voice. A gale was blowing that evening. Loveday went suddenly to her window and flung it open. The wind was like a great swelling length of silk shaken out from the skies. It burst rudely into the bedroom, crashing the door to, that led to Mrs. Trevelyan's bedroom. Very quietly Loveday opened a drawer and pulled out her passport, which, miraculously, lay just where she expected to find it; then she tiptoed through her other door, through the hall, and into the sitting-room, where an open stove was burning. Without a second's compunction she deliberately flung her passport where the flame was hottest. Her mouth curved into sudden mischief. "Disposing of the body!" she thought—then caught her breath, as a sudden flare shot up and she saw the last of her photograph before it dropped into black ash.

. . . The wind sent a swirl of black smoke down the chimney and into the room. . . . Then again . . . and again. . . . The whole air was evil with smoke; familiar objects showed dimly and were blotted out. . . . Smoke and choking darkness . . . like hell. And her own likeness burning. Loveday was aghast. She battled for common sense, through her superstitious terrors; stamped her foot. "Don't be a fool, I tell you. I tell you—he hates fools. . . ."

Clear again, the room. Eyes that still watered. . . . Blink them; blink away panic. It was only a passport burning—and the wind—and a bad chimney.

The stiff outside cover was taking a long time to burn. Supposing her mother came in, in time to see what was being destroyed? Loveday looked very like a guilty schoolgirl as she squatted by the fire and tried to assist the flames at their job. It was only the view of her delicately disdainful profile that inspired romantic comparisons. Seen from the front, and, as now, alert, listening, guilt-stricken, she might have been

still a rebel from the Upper Fourth, triumphant at outwitting authority, yet amazed by the sheer awfulness of what she was doing. For, after all, a passport was official. You could not get over being respectful to passports, even when they were your own. "How do you *do*, passport?" bowing low—and, bowing back: "How do you do, Loveday?"

And to think that *she* had actually been idiot enough to suggest this trip over the frontier into France. How on earth was she to remember that it would involve passports? Of course Mummy would be sure to look at her daughter's passport, as she always did; spreading it out and sighing sentimentally over the photograph of Loveday at sixteen: "Who would ever have thought that you would turn out quite nice-looking?"

Better to take no risks! Better to burn it!

Impatiently Loveday thrust at the last charred mass, with the tip of the bellows; for just imagine—she had read of such accidents, again in connexion with the Disposal-of-the-Body!—just imagine if one small fragment escaped the burning, and flew out into the room when Mummy was there; and Mummy, picking it up, would say: "Who has been burning paper again? I won't have it, Loveday!" . . . And supposing it were just that bit of page with the visas on it, that Mummy mustn't, simply mustn't, see; visas with queer foreign stampings, much more large and foreign and bizarre than French or Italian; Mummy would notice Hungarian and Czecho-Slovakian visas. How could Loveday ever have accounted for them? She who had been left in England, to remain there till she came out to Italy. . . .

If you merely hide a thing, it gets found, always. Burning was safer.

Satisfied at last that not a single betraying scrap of her passport remained, Loveday crept back into her room.

There she suddenly began to rush about and bang open drawers, throwing her possessions on to the floor, pulling out boxes and suit-cases from under the bed, impatient, noisy, desperate.

Of course Mrs. Trevelyan opened the door between their rooms.

"Loveday, what *are* you doing?"

A whole drawer was tugged out, turned somersault; and its contents spilt on the floor.

"Oh, Mummy!" Loveday shook her hair forward over her face. She was very flushed and breathless in this turmoil of her own creating. . . . "But perhaps it has got behind—" She ran her hand along the space at the back of the drawer. "It's not there, either." Then she sat down, flump, on the floor among her scattered property; abashed, and prepared for a scolding. "Mummy dear, I don't really know what you'll say, but—I can't find my passport. I simply don't know where I put it. I must have had it when I arrived on the frontier, of course, so could I have left it in the train? When I got out at Porto Rinaldo, I was so frightfully pleased to see you, Mummy—"

"My darling, that's no excuse!"

"I know, Lamb-Bird, I know. I put it in, hoping to propitiate you. But you don't look awfully propitiated. Do you think perhaps it's in your room, Mummy? I've turned everything inside out here, but it might have got into your room somehow. May I look?"

"No," said Laura Trevelyan. "Thank you very much, no. *My* things are quite in order, and I should naturally have noticed your passport. Loveday, I forbid it!"

But her daughter was in that mood when she found she could ease her conscience of at least some of its guilt by making the outward confusion worse. She longed to reduce her mother's tidy room to the present state of her own. How glorious to turn all Mummy's drawers upside-down on the floor, and then dance Black Bottom among them! Thwarted, her mind leapt at fresh opportunities for chaos: "Well, perhaps it's somewhere in the sitting-room, Mummy. I may have slung it there when I first came in. May I go and look? May I—" with a slanting glance of roguery— "May I have a *thorough* whoosh-round?"

How badly you could behave, once you began!

"You will sit down quietly and let *me* look," commanded her mother.

"Oh, no, Mummy!" She could not bear that. It was one thing to rush round herself, spinning up the dust; but she could not deliberately sit still and watch her mother get exhausted by searching systematically for a passport that she herself knew perfectly well was in cinders on the sitting-room fire.

Nevertheless, this was what she had to do. There was no way out of it. Mrs. Trevelyan picked up all the fallen motley of handkerchiefs, garters, gloves, and odd silk stockings with ladders in them; and began folding them into neat, methodical piles, saying as she did so: "You see, it isn't here. . . . And not here. . . . Have we looked here? . . . Yes, well, these can go back!" While a hopeless and contrite Loveday followed her round like the clown at a circus, doing everything after her mother had already done it.

"And tomorrow," said Mrs. Trevelyan, after a final unravelling of the many-coloured labyrinth that Loveday called "my things"—"tomorrow we shall have to go to the consul and have a fresh passport made out for you. And that means postponing Nice for I don't know how long. It takes about a fortnight, I believe. You're a very untidy girl, Loveday, and a great sorrow to your mother. There's surely no difficulty in looking after your things properly, especially as we're not rich. . . . And to lose a passport of all things! . . Haven't I always told you . . . ?"

The scolding went on. It was the nice, normal scolding of any mother to any daughter.

Loveday promised obedience, swore repentance. . . . Any daughter to any mother.

CHAPTER VI

BOILING OIL

AND then Judith turned up.

Mrs. Trevelyan happened to be standing on her sitting-room balcony, enjoying the sunshine. When she saw Judith's figure walking slowly up the road, she received a heavy battering shock like a blow on the head, followed by a sensation of choking. . . . Here was what she had been dreading. "They" had found her out; "They" had not left her long in peace; "They" would tempt Loveday away from her. . . . "They"—the intruders . . . the dark aggressive force that hated mothers. . . .

Judith was nearer, now. . . . Ah, if you could only treat enemies as though they were enemies! Frankly proclaim them so; defend the citadel by open warfare. Here was Judith, directly below. . . . Thrust your daughter behind the wall, and then, from over the ledge, pour boiling oil. . . . "They" would not come again, on their pitiless errand. Keep the home inviolate? But how are you to do it if politeness to visitors is the social law, and coldness to visitors the only feeble weapon allowed? Coldness?—Boiling oil!

Raging, Mrs. Trevelyan went into the house. She heard knocking at the front door. The servant rushed in, asking whether the visitor—if it were a visitor—should have a place laid for lunch; or whether lunch, just ready, should be served ignoring the visitor; or was she to wait before serving lunch, till the visitor went? *La signorina* was not in, yet, from *la città*, so perhaps—?

"I don't know! I don't know! Answer the door!" cried Mrs. Trevelyan, irritably. How just like Judith, always inconsiderate, to come, if she must, just at this time!

They met in the spirit of awful courtesy; Laura frosty and condescending; Judith still trying to remember, as she had been trying hard to remember all the way up from the station, what were Mrs. Trevelyan's good qualities? It was unfortunate that she could recall most clearly a phrase once used by a friend of hers, on first catching sight of Loveday's mother: "Who *is* the pompous old tea-pot?"

And Judith's own nonchalant answer: "She's the best argument that exists in favour of suttee. . . ."

For she had suffered much, from Loveday's mother.

Laura, while *la Signora* Maitland was being admitted, had hastily put on her hat, hoping thereby to make Judith feel not at home. It was the hat with the Slav effect, to which Loveday had so firmly objected; and it slanted up on both sides to a peak in front—in fact, it was, indeed, not unlike the lid of a tea-pot, and completed the resemblance.

"I am so sorry my daughter is out, Mrs. Maitland. In fact, I don't expect to see her home all day."

Would luck be with her, over this? They had visited the consul that morning; and she had left Loveday at Bartolozzi's, being talked to by Colonel Davenport; the length of his anecdotes appeared at this juncture as a blessing; but at any moment he might unleash her.

"I had no idea you were back again in Italy. It looks as though we were following each other round"—what she meant was that Judith had been following Loveday round. "You don't usually come back to your villa until May, do you? So original of you, on the Riviera. Loveday didn't tell me. She doesn't tell her mother anything."

Judith expressed her sorrow at finding Loveday out, and added: "It doesn't really matter, because I came to see you, Mrs. Trevelyan. I heard of your loss. You must have had a very difficult time."

"Ah, my poor cousin!"

Again Judith struggled and vanquished her more flippant

self, that heard in Lamb-Bird's lament the echo of an ox and a Bovril bottle.

"Yes, indeed. We were at school together. Her death has been a great blow to me. Did you hear about it from Loveday?" suspiciously. "I suppose she has been writing to you?"

Judith apologized for having been written to. "Her letter was forwarded to me. Yes, we are back at our cottage at Lagnello. We shall be there all the summer now." And then Judith, with the preliminary shudder of one about to plunge voluntarily into an icy pool, said: "I was wondering if you could spare Loveday. . . ."

Laura's eyes grew round and blue and hard. Yes, she had been right in her forebodings. Here it was again. Always the same trouble. Why couldn't they leave her *alone?* Why couldn't they leave Loveday alone? Why must they shatter her rare peace and happiness, so hard to win, so painfully difficult to keep, by their perpetual treacherous attempts to steal her daughter away?

"Certainly I could spare her," she said; "I never interfere with my daughter. But she wouldn't leave her mother just now. So it is no good inviting her, Mrs. Maitland. It is very kind of you, but it is no good." And she was so angry that she only just refrained from trembling into the further remark: "I expect you have plenty of other guests to help keep you entertained."

But she heard Loveday's key in the hall door, and knew that the gods were not on her side. She tried to turn the subject before the girl should enter the room. Perhaps that woman would not allude again to Loveday going to stay with her, having been so definitely rebuffed. "You never met my poor cousin, did you, Mrs. Maitland? I can't remember. She would have been so sorry to have missed you. But death takes us all, doesn't it?"

Loveday rushed into the room with an ecstatic cry of "Judith, you angel!"—then swiftly relapsed into wariness, as

she saw her mother's hackles were stiff and bristling; almost literally bristling, for the upward rush of her hair from the nape to the crown always seemed intensified and more aggressive in the presence of the foe.

Loveday and Judith exchanged a look of partnership. Mrs. Trevelyan saw it.

"I was hearing about your cousin's death," said a decorous Judith Maitland.

"Oh, poor Cousin Augusta. Yes, wasn't it awful? That's her cat over there, look! That frowsy beast licking his paws."

"It's a link with the past," quoth Mrs. Trevelyan, sentimentally. "That is how I look on it—a link with the past."

A link with the past! Loveday marvelled that her mother could possibly desire a link that would bind her memory to that fantastically horrible scene of Cousin Augusta's death.

"Siamese, isn't it?" Judith laboured on.

"Yes, nearly; a sort of suburb of Siam. It never does anything but lick its paws," continued Loveday, taking her cue from Judith. They both babbled nervously about the cat, because it seemed a safe topic, and Mrs. Trevelyan looked so like exploding.

"When I bring it food, it just waves a paw, signifying: 'Put it down for me, will you, where I can get at it without moving?' "

"It's obviously a cat o' Mary," remarked Judith. "May I smoke, Mrs. Trevelyan?"

"It's my poor Cousin Augusta's cat," repeated Mrs. Trevelyan, firmly. "The woman's a half-wit," she added to herself.

"What *do* you mean?" from Loveday.

Judith quoted:

"The cats o' Mary seldom bother, for they have inherited that good part;
But the cats o' Martha favour their mother of the careful soul and the troubled heart."

The pent-up wrath had found a cause for explosion—and exploded: "I will *not* have the Bible made fun of in my

house. And I won't have you laughing, Loveday. Even if your friend chooses to make jokes about sacred things, no one shall ever say that I countenanced it."

The other two stood amazed at such passion.

"But, Mrs. Trevelyan, I wasn't making fun of sacred things. It never entered my head. And that wasn't the Bible. It was Kipling."

"That makes it worse! What the Bible says about Martha and Mary and Lazarus is quite good enough for me. It isn't likely, Mrs. Maitland, that I'd let my daughter go to visit a roof where she is likely to hear such things going on. Some people mix up being reverent with being old-fashioned, and if so, I'm very glad I'm one of them, yes!—I mean that I'm not one of them."

Loveday had said imploringly: "Mummy!" several times, while this tremulous confusion of speech poured, stuttering, over its last reticent barrier. But at the mention of an invitation refused on her behalf, she, too, chilled into anger, and her eyes went hard and narrow and very blue.

"Have you asked me to go and stay with you, Judith? Have you? Now?"

Her friend nodded, but remained silent. She was afraid of what she might say to her hostess, if she said anything at all.

"Then I'm going!" from Loveday.

"I forbid it!" simultaneously from Laura Trevelyan.

"Can't help it. I'm going. I won't have things refused for me when I'm not here. If you had left it to me, I might have been decent."

. . . Boiling oil! Boiling oil!

"Not another word, Loveday. Leave the house. Go to your room and stay there. I forbid you to go. It's always been the same, ever since you knew Judith. Always trying to get away from me, and going to her. I sacrificed my life for you. I have to feed and clothe you. I think of you all day long, and then you fly off to strangers who only want you because you can amuse them for an hour or two, and not even because of that. Not even because of that. I warned you a great

many times, and I can't say anything more now, but I will not have my daughter put into an anonymous position."

"You mean anomalous," corrected Loveday, coldly. She knew quite well that once again her mother was hinting at the old unfair obsession that Judith was playing a deep and crafty game: pretending to a fondness that she did not feel for Loveday, so that she might have a scapegoat handy. Mrs. Trevelyan could never forget that she had once seen Captain William Maitland look admiringly at her daughter.

"We shall not need to prolong this quarrel," said Mrs. Trevelyan. "And it's not good saying anything, Loveday, for I've made up my mind. It's time it ended. My duty is to protect you. Of course, it's quite out of the question for you to accept this invitation, kind though it is. And now, as we are just going out— Good-bye, Mrs. Maitland. We can remain perfectly good friends, but we need never see one another again!"

CHAPTER VII

THE MOURNING OF DEMETER

WHEN Mrs. Trevelyan woke up after her heavy, exhausted sleep, she felt that the flat was silent and empty. Too empty.

And she knew at once what had happened, but she was afraid to verify it. "My headache is much better," she told herself. "It's wonderful what a difference a little nap makes. Dear me, it's not yet four o'clock. And then—" Yet she was aware of comforting herself with a vain legend. "I will lie here a little longer, and Loveday can bring me a cup of tea."

It was no good. Loveday had gone—her daughter had gone. She knew it. Her daughter had fled while she herself had been away on a voyage of sleep. You must not relax your vigilance. . . . They won't let you. . . . They will come and snatch your daughter away. . . . They won't leave you alone with her.

Very stiffly, and trembling a little at the knees, Laura Trevelyan got off her bed. She kept up the pretence for a few minutes more; dressed herself again, and even put on her teapot hat.

"After all, we might go down to Bartolozzi's for tea. It's more amusing for Loveday."

Then at last she opened the door that led into Loveday's room.

The clothes which she had so carefully tidied up the day before, after the girl's frantic search for the passport, were now tossed about again in the same confusion. It was like a nightmare where everything happened twice. The cupboard door was wide open; most of Loveday's frocks were missing from their pegs; Loveday's suit-case was gone. Laura flung a shuddering look at the dressing-table. Yes, it looked strangely

blank; the toilet things were gone, too, the brush and comb, the mirror, and the powder-boxes. Everything left behind was scattered and spilt and hurled about, over the bed, over the wash-stand, over the window-sill. You could tell that from this room someone had escaped; not simply gone out, but rushed away rejoicing. Laura Trevelyan followed Loveday's trail out into the hall. Some small coiled object lay on the ground near the front door—Loveday's girdle. It must have dropped off, in the flight. Mechanically the mother bent, picked it up, folded it round her fingers. A strip of white and anemone mauve. How pretty the child had looked in those colours.

She had gone to Judith, of course.

Suddenly Mrs. Trevelyan realized that she could not stay in the flat alone. She stumped down the stone stairs and out into the street.

Where was she to go? Not her normal way down into the town and into the street of shops, where she would meet friends—where she might meet Madame Strada, who would at once ask for Loveday, and on being told the truth would say: "So your little daughter has run away from you again? Isn't she a naughty child? And she hasn't been with you for very long, has she? You must scold her well when she comes back."

How dare Loveday expose her to the agony of hearing Madame Strada's voice—anybody's voice—making the accusation: "Your daughter does not love you any more!"? That was what lurked behind the inquiries: "If you can't keep her, she does not love you. She will not come back."

Shaking with rage, not knowing where she went, so long as she need not meet those charges face to face, Laura Trevelyan turned her back on Porto Rinaldo and went up into the hills. She had never been there before. She did not know at first that she was going there. She was too angry to care where she went. Trudging, panting, a dumpy little figure unsuitably dressed in thick black silk, she butted her way through the

sunshine that lay hot and golden over all the slopes that curved around the bay of the Mediterranean.

Wherever Laura looked, she saw flowers.

The olive-trees were twinkling white with flowers; under her feet the flowers broke away in waves and drifts. They foamed and tumbled and rioted over the terrace walls. Millions of flowers. . . . Triumphant, jeering flowers. . . . And all flowers reminded her of Loveday. Poppies were spread like brilliant scarlet patchwork; valerian spouted in fountains between the honey-coloured stones; love-in-a-mist . . . snapdragon . . . cowslips, purple orchis, and borage a deeper blue than heaven. . . . Flowers that grew in a bell or a star or a hood; in arrogant spikes of yellow fire, like the broom; or dependent as the wild sweet-pea, which flung itself, curling and clinging, over all the rest. . . .

And Laura Trevelyan remembered how she had been stirred by the sight of just such a glorious profusion of flowers; other flowers; anemones and narcissi, of the early spring, lightly prisoned behind glass, in the town, in the street, in the shop. Two months ago . . . And Loveday had arrived that evening. She had planned then that she would go up into the hills with Loveday, to pick flowers. And yet—how was it, after all, that the wish had come to nothing? That day after day they had wasted, doing the old stale things—paying calls, coffee at Bartolozzi's? . . .

And now—here she was. And seeing it alone. Alone and without Loveday. Perhaps Loveday, too, was up in the hills among the flowers. "Loveday, what do you *do* at Lagnello, that you're always wanting to be there?" "Oh—I don't know, Mummy," vaguely; "it's amusing, you know. . . . People . . . and we talk and lie about . . . sometimes we go for long walks into the hills . . . I don't know. We just do what we like. . . ."

A cry broke from Laura Trevelyan. If Loveday were seeing the flowers—but with Judith? Not with her mother. What was the *good* of all this flowering consummation? What was the

use, but more and more cruelty? Had she been a goddess, she would have used her power to blast them all; to dry the sap, shrivel the leaf, wither the silk. Her daughter had left her. The flowers would all come back next year, and the year after. What promise had she, who had created Loveday as God created poppies and bright broom, what promise had she that her happiness would ever come back?

Laura opened her hand and found in it a crumpled lily that, unnoticing, she must have clutched in passing. Lilies of Saint Anthony. Saint Anthony—he helped you to find what was lost. Would he help her to find her lost daughter?

No one would help her. They were all against the mother: God and the saints, men and women and Judith, the hot sun and the lavish fragrant blossoming. They took the daughter away.

She sat down, no goddess, but a small, cross, disconsolate woman, powdered with dust, very tired, very hot, with a blistered heel, and a stitch in her side. And she had a vision of Loveday running in the distance, and was jealous of her swiftness, her slimness, her gay freedom. One day her young daughter would have a daughter of her own, to make her suffer like this. Then she would understand. No—she must, she *must* understand it sooner!—"For I can't wait," thought Laura. A picture danced before her eyes, blending with the gold and the glow and the dazzling blue sky, of herself patiently plodding in pursuit; following Loveday, following her, and arriving at Judith's, where . . . yes—*yes!*—where she would find Loveday unhappy, wanting her mother so much, glad to see her. "Oh, Mummy, I'm coming back!" She could be magnanimous then: "Yes, darling, and you'll stay with me always." "Oh, Mummy, it's been so dark and horrid. . . . Nobody is really as sweet as you. Belonging *does* count!" Had Loveday ever said that, or was she imagining it? She could almost hear it, like an echo of the girl's ardent voice. Warm ecstatic kisses. . . .

The picture passed and faded. Fear came back in its stead. Where had Loveday gone? Where would Loveday go?—To

what netherworld impenetrable? Laura Trevelyan tried hard to force her imagination down into places where she had never been. To achieve such entrance she would so willingly have sacrificed her Olympian respectability; it was a barren mountain, huge and shadeless, between her and the beloved. Her sheltered early life, her safe widowhood, her virtue and good name, her friends—these she rejected, too; they were against her in the search.

And then she thought, resentfully, of her mandate to Loveday, which had been a mere twig tossed into bright water and instantly swirled away out of sight: "I forbid it, Loveday!" And yet Loveday went on unheeding. Why was she a mother? The only mother of the only daughter in the world? A priest, her own Father Delaney, would reprove her for such a thought: "Be humble," he would say, in gentle admonition. "Be humble!"—No, she would *not* be humble! She, who had worked a miracle, twenty-one years ago. It was unfair and shattering that the creator should not have complete control for ever over the being created. It was her right to hold fast this racing silver. Loveday was hers. It was her right to keep her all to herself, round herself, and for herself, always and eternally. For one frustrated moment Laura Trevelyan felt that she could not bear her daughter to be so wilfully alive if such life were always to be escaping from her. Her own old father—how often had he thundered: "I would rather see my daughter dead at my feet . . ."

Dead at her feet. . . . Only so could she keep Loveday; and in doing so, she would keep nothing.

Can one have no living thing for one's own? No. There were robbers everywhere, snatching, covetous creatures, who did not care that far behind Loveday, calling her, far behind the careless fugitive, trotted a small, cross, desolate mother in black.

PART TWO: NETHERWORLD

CHAPTER I

THE VALE OF ENNA

. . . And now again running down the road, running, escaping—always escaping from some hell or other!

What hell it was, thought Loveday.

Had she time to catch her train to Lagnello? Sometimes the trains were late, but never, of course, when it mattered so much that they should be. A clock came in sight: another four minutes. She could do it in four minutes; her suit-case swinging in her hand, bumping against her legs, she ran faster still.

For she had had to wait, before starting, till Mummy was asleep; not that she was afraid, but another row— Oh, no, not another row! Not so soon. . . . Rows, when unfair reproaches were jabbed out at her, wherever they hurt most; and she answered back what she had never meant to say, and Mummy sat terribly upright, her face red, her mouth tight, her eyes very round and blue and hard. . . . Loveday shuddered.

Taking her ticket, dashing through the barrier, hurling herself and her suit-case with a final leap and scramble into the carriage, just as the train left Porto Rinaldo—under all these details that simply had to be attended to before she could get away, lay coiled the thought, smarting and ashamed, that Mummy had been rude to Judith—damnably rude. . . . Judith was *her* friend; and yet in her house—hers and Mummy's —Judith had been insulted. That was a thing you simply didn't do. Mummy herself had taught you that. It was a violation. . . . The nursery code persisted: If you had your little friends to tea—even if you didn't want them—even if they were hateful, smug little girls—even if all that, you could knock them down and sit on their faces, but you could *never*

be rude to them—not in your own house. And if you could, Mummy couldn't. Violation of nursery faith. . . . A small, hot, dirty Loveday rushing impulsively across the lawn and into the sitting-room. "Oh, I say, Mummy, you don't mind, do you, I've brought home Dorothy and Pam and Althea? They've nowhere to go for tea this afternoon. Is it all right?" And Mrs. Trevelyan's quiet reminder: "Loveday, you must *not* bring children to tea without first asking my permission!" "Oh, but Mummy, they're here!" And that made it all right, because, though Mummy scolded you afterwards, and though she didn't like Dorothy and Pam and Althea, you could trust her to be nice to them at the moment. And they said: "I think your mother's sweet" or "not half bad" or "a sport," according to their vocabularies; and you threw up your head and answered in off-hand style: "Not at all"; and were proud; and, at the same time, wondered what on earth they expected. . . . Any other behaviour was unthinkable. You had to make a gesture, if the world rocked.

But the world had rocked, and then rocked more violently, until it lay shattered now.

Mummy had spoken *of* Judith before like that, but never *to* Judith. Loveday had been helpless. These were the only amends in her power—to pack her suit-case and go straight off to Judith, thus disassociating herself from everything Mummy had flung out in a temper. Was that the right thing to do? You threw yourself about from one loyalty to another, hoping to be decent, but there was never quite enough decency to go round; it had to be ripped away from one place to cover the next. As now, for instance, Loveday did not feel unforgiving any more towards her mother, though she had still been furious while she was squashing her things into a suit-case and rushing down the hill towards the station and the train. But there was an element of betrayal, in thus leaving an old woman while she slept, that the girl hated. "But what could I *do?* Mummy shouldn't have let me down in front of Judith. What else *could* I do? Oh hell! And now she'll wake up and be simply ramping, and after-

wards she'll cry. . . . It's not good for her to cry. Afterwards she'll be ill. *I'm* all right. I'll forget all about it, once I'm at Lagnello. It'll be amusing, and there'll be new people; and they'll make a fuss of me. I can always rush away and find something." . . . She could not quite define her conviction that there were always fresh worlds for the young flying from the old; and only the stale, hot, miserable world for the old toiling after the young. But she did know that Mummy would go on crying and that it wasn't good for her. Loveday felt responsible, and a beast, in consequence. But again—what could she do? Mummy had insulted Judith. It was her job to put that right by going to Judith.

And—Loveday was honest!—it just happened that she wanted to go, too.

She had been growing restless, fed to the teeth, with Porto Rinaldo, doddling about and wearing white, and being *charmante* and *ingénue;* and then all this fuss with the lawyers; and Mummy getting more and more autocratic; and Nando trying to avoid her. This was much more amusing—going to something new. New hells for old! And suddenly Loveday began to laugh. It was such a familiar sensation, this sudden wild flight; a fatalist's acceptance— "Another dead man!" and then the question: "*Now* what's coming?" Already, even before reaching Judith's house, *Casa dei Sette*, the House of the Seven, she had forgotten her mother and her desolate tears. "That's the trouble; I thought I'd forget!" she might have said had she not already forgotten.

As quickly, as lightly, she had forgotten what had lain behind her in the cities of mid-Europe when she had fled from von Tadelheim and his broken promises. That had been fun; that had been adventure as she had expected it, by the solemn warnings of friends and relations, by incidents in absurd and incredible books. Innocent maiden fleeing . . . wicked foreigner in pursuit. . . . Who cares? She had taken a risk, and at least Loveday was a good loser. She remembered now that evening in Budapest, with a gay impenitent chuckle. There had been loot, too—her silver coat! "Damn!

I meant to show it to Judith; but now I haven't packed it," thought Loveday. Echoes . . . familiar sensations . . . packing in a hurry . . . scrambling your things into a trunk or suit-case all anyhow . . . slam down the lid, leaving everything in confusion. . . . She had done it so often. But twice—twice she had run away from Petal and her flat, and the memory was not amusing, for she had left horror behind, and trailed some of the horror away with her. . . .

CHARLES had wanted her to go and stay with Petal. Petal was his mother—a very different sort of mother from Loveday's. So she had done what he wanted; that was why it all went dark; she was right only when she followed her own way, her own free way, not caring; her laughing, plundering, buccaneer's way; cutting off consequences as she ran. Often Loveday had said to herself: "If ever I fall really in love, I shall be done, so I'm not going to . . . I'll cling to my own special lay." But that was just what had tricked her in her first meeting with Charles, for she had been on the wrong side from the beginning and could not put herself right.

It happened about a couple of months after she had run away from the hostel, and run away from Freya's studio, from the circle of safety wherein her mother had so carefully placed her—symbolically padlocked doors, and fussy injunctions to the matron of the hostel, and a regular monthly allowance, and, beyond that, a vigilant ring of friends: "You will keep an eye on my little daughter, won't you?"

—Loveday had broken through them all.

Well, but what could Mummy imagine? She couldn't seriously have trotted off to Porto Rinaldo believing that Loveday could possibly stay in the exact spot where she had been so carefully dumped? What *did* she think? Or didn't she think?—dared she not think? If you put a pony in a field, a young fresh pony, leaping with wickedness, and say to it: "Stay in that field!" and go away yourself, does the pony stay? Oh, a few rotten old broken-down fences and shibboleths, but anyone could leap a fence! Loveday put up with

the hostel and its restrictions, its dull security, for exactly four days.

The glamour of the studio lasted longer. Hard work, certainly. Dancing and dancing all the time; perpetual breathless rush from pupil to pupil. But Freya's clientèle stepped straight out of the social column of a popular journal; society Olympians were at all times tearing in and out of the studio; learning the most modern step, between cocktails and lunch. They petted Freya's latest pet, this tall, pretty child, shy at first, then suddenly frank; liked her original racy confessions, her indiscreet confidences, her shameless coaxing to be given presents and an amusing time.

Freya herself, fascinating, incomprehensible, kept Loveday's affections for a full six weeks, till Loveday learnt that she was being exploited as a pet in competition with Freya's partner, who also ran a favourite child, whose mother had paid a bigger premium than Loveday's mother, but who had not Loveday's gift for dancing. Loveday *versus* Sonia. A thousand complications spinning and flashing between the rival camps. Loveday felt them and was thrilled by them, without ever understanding. Financial complications; amorous complications. . . .

Olga Ray, Freya's partner, had an elder brother who was partly a partner and exhibition dancer at the studio; partly not. It was all on a shifting basis. He wanted an intrigue with Loveday, when, to keep the camps level and evenly conducted, he should have wanted it with Sonia, his sister's protégée. Olga was furious. Freya dropped a hint to Loveday. Obediently Loveday turned her back upon the brother and tried to gain favour with Freya, by being adorable only to Freya's fiancé, whom she took to be a benevolent old gentleman. Amazingly, Freya was not pleased with this, either. Olga encouraged it. Loveday, chidden, and not knowing what she had done which was amiss, crossed over to Olga's camp. A jealous Sonia, whose real name was Alice, immediately retaliated by telling Freya that—oh, there were always things to tell Freya! You put out your hand at random and picked

out any of them. Freya smiled upon little Alice and awarded her the privilege of dancing for the first three nights with their best male exhibition dancer at the opening of the New Parthenon Roof Club. Loveday, who was by far the better dancer, had already been promised that she and not Sonia should represent the studio, now at the zenith of its success. Besides, was she not Freya's favourite? She was enraged and could not understand how she had forfeited her reward for working so hard, on and on, all day. Oh, of course, it was fun, too, but the clients came pouring in and gave you no rest: "Just half an hour at the Flat Charleston. Have you time? . . . Well, ten minutes, then?—Or perhaps if Loveday Trevelyan isn't doing anything—? She's quite wonderful with me. My husband says I'm a different dancer since she took me in hand!" "My husband" was Lord Sellington, an influential personage. If he started talking about Loveday, praising her, and if other people did it too—? For a brief while, Loveday was ambitious—thought of herself at the very tip of fame and popularity, as a dancer in London, in request everywhere—a new Leonora Hughes, or, if she found a partner to equal her, cut out Moss and Fontana, cut out the Astaires; and where would Cortez and Peggy be, when Loveday appeared and danced? The possibility intoxicated her. This work-like-the-devil-and-grow-rich-and-famous idea, which up till now had seemed a legend to encourage idle flappers—perhaps there was something in it! Only six weeks at the studio, and already the society ones were clamouring for Freya Leslie's favourite! "I must be something quite too marvellous!" thought happy Loveday.

Naturally, the snap came. It came with the opening of the New Parthenon Roof Club.

The three or four really smart dancing-studios in London had each sent an apprentice dancing couple, as well as their principals. It was a good advertisement. Loveday had told everyone that she was the apprentice chosen. A friend of Freya's, another benevolent old gentleman, an admiral this time, had offered her a dress for the occasion. Loveday, en-

raptured, had accepted it. It was as easy for her to accept as picking flowers! . . . The pretty things were sprinkled about; you coveted them; you had to have them!—so she argued with herself, sitting on her bed, chin propped up by her two fists. . . . "It isn't as though it could lead to anything, as Mummy might say, because nowadays we know exactly *what* it would lead to, if we let it! In Mummy's period of history, in the Great Don't Period, if a girl accepted anything except lilies of the valley and long white kid gloves, then the wicked lord asked her to dine in a private room, and she still didn't recognize his lay. By the time she did, it was always somehow too late. Now it's all clear as daylight—so it's safe!" she concluded happily, and slipped on Absinthe-and-Green-Devils, jagged lengths of opal and deeper green, and pale drowned yellows at the rim.

When Freya coldly informed her that Sonia, instead, was to dance that night at the Roof Club, Loveday went cold with disappointment. Then haughty. Freya, enraged at the fastidious disdain of such methods, outlined in the tilt of Loveday's chin and the curve of her short upper lip, promptly decided that her protégée was getting above herself and needed an even sharper lesson. . . .

The whole gang was assembled in the studio. The gang consisted of Freya and Olga, and Olga's brother, and Sonia; Freddie Scott and Ivor Newton, two male pros; and that other apprentice, Betty Mostyn, who was nobody's special favourite; a nebulous lord, "always there,"—perhaps he was one of their financial backers,—and Freya's fiancé. Perhaps Freya remembered one or two looks and words of his . . . for she said now, in the voice of a good sweet woman encouraging young people all to play happily together in their nice home: "Oh, and Loveday—I think it would be a good thing,—don't you?—if you could manage to be here by ten o'clock tomorrow morning, instead of strolling in at a quarter to one? Sonia will be worn out, as she's going to keep it up late tonight, and you might take her lessons just for once. Mrs. Woodgate and her daughter, and Mrs.

Radclyffe . . ." she mentioned three of the weightiest of the studio's elderly pupils—"have all booked their times for tomorrow. See to it, will you?"

She was in time tomorrow, and she taught the Charleston steps to Mrs. and Miss Woodgate and Mrs. Radclyffe.

She did not go to the studio again, not while Freya was there.

"Hell!" she thought, teaching the Charleston to Mrs. and Miss Woodgate. . . . For one must make a gesture at all costs. Yet she was sorry that Freya had turned out such a beast, sorry to have to walk away while the lights were still blazing and the fun was high. She would consult Mercedes tonight. Mercedes was the girl whose rooms she temporarily shared. And perhaps she could get her in somewhere as a mannequin or on the films. "I'm sick of dancing, anyhow," cried Loveday, persuading herself. . . .

It was not her lay to hanker for a thing after it had ended. "Another dead man!"—and *that* empty bottle went to join the rest.

So Loveday slipped down into an existence which was strangely like all that her mother had feared for her; and yet proving oddly that such grim fears were unreasonable, for she was safe enough, living within the zone of her own sophistication.

From her experience with Freya at the studio she had acquired a philosophy which she believed to be eternal, and which, indeed, was to last her for nearly two years: that it was unwise to gambol too carelessly and with such puppy friendliness round the feet of the established great; for at any moment you were liable to be trodden upon, and then it's difficult not to squeal! And whatever happens—thus the philosophy developed itself—you mustn't squeal. From thence it might have appeared that the next stage would be along the stoic proposition of never showing when you are hurt; but here Loveday diverged from the stoics: Never *get* hurt! Never give them a chance! "Thank goodness," thought Loveday, flattering herself, "I'm hard and cold!" She resolved

further to be a happy, careless parasite; to let all the world work while she held out her hands for the benefits; to stick at nothing, yet always to keep control of her pace. Finally—Loveday never summed up her creed in quite such an orderly fashion as this; it lay about in bits and pieces—but finally, never to be sentimental, and never to take yourself seriously. She was in no danger of the last, for she had all the faults of youth except that one.

Poor darling Lamb-Bird, what would she say if she could see her little daughter running so confidently and without protection along the edge of an abyss—of an abyss that perpetually crumbled into yet more sheer abysses?

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner at their proper times; a permanent address; a regular supply of money; and a fair, unclouded name; light-heartedly Loveday threw overboard these assurances of a self-respecting existence, as mere ballast not required for her cruise.

She and Mercedes were always changing rooms. Either Mercedes quarrelled with the landlord; or a richer friend, going away, lent them a flat for a week or two, and it seemed worth while to give up their hugger-mugger residence even for such short periods of luxury. As for their meals, unless Mercedes was employed in film work, they slept on until an hour before lunch-time, when, pale and yawning, but rippling still with jokes from the evening before, they would rise and bath; then, with all the serious attention to detail, all the conscientious and painstaking labour which they bestowed on nothing else, they would make up from the tip of their beautifully shaped feet to the crown of their delicately moulded and exquisitely shingled heads. Separately or together they lunched at somebody else's expense; failing that, separately or together they went without lunch; or they had a silly lunch, lacking entirely in what Mrs. Trevelyan would have called nourishment. The rest of the day merely led up to the great event of the evening. They would treat themselves to expensive manicures or hair-cuts, or even, for debt held no fears, to a sudden bout of expensive shopping. Perhaps there

would be cocktail parties at five or six o'clock; perhaps a motor ride with some boy more in love with speed than with them. And in the evening, after a long and careful toilet, party after party; dinners, suppers, cabaret shows; private gangs that merged into other gangs and became one, at restaurants; occasionally a theatre—revue or musical comedy; and dancing; and a great many scattered presents—brilliant twinkling nights, and then, dawn. . . . If no car were available: "Who's to pay for the taxi? . . . Oh, he gave you enough and some over. All right!" The clothes slipped off and left in a tumbled heap on the floor. And sleep. Mercedes slept heavily, but Loveday thrashed about in restless dreams. And in the morning more sleep, and the gas-fire turned on with a pop just before noon, and a letter from Mummy scolding her daughter for not having written; the letter forwarded from the hostel via the bank; and, once a month, twelve pounds—pounds, not guineas—from Laura Trevelyan, accompanied by a threat to reduce it to ten, or even eight, unless Loveday wrote oftener. Twelve pounds already pledged heavily in a dozen different directions—owing for rent; owing to Mercedes; borrowed last night; and: "It's come, Mercedes! Let's have a binge! Never mind about paying that old bill. It'll get itself paid, or they'll sue me, or something. Besides, tomorrow I'm going to start work."

She did work, spasmodically, until: "Hell! I've had enough of this!" was the signal that her skies of diligent virtue had clouded over again.

Once she went to a big dressmaking firm, of noble and expensive fame, who were advertising for a couple of extra mannequins for their dress-show at Ciro's. Loveday was told to stay behind after the crowd of applicants, grumbling and chattering, had been informed that the posts had already been filled. Loveday—in a hell of a funk, as she afterwards told Mercedes, and therefore looking more than usually tall, lissom and haughty—remained. The manager asked her what experience she had had. Indifferently, she lied, her drawl indicating that she was almost too experienced to live, and

would rather die of ennui. They informed her that she was to appear that night without rehearsal.

Gloriously and faultlessly dressed, Loveday stood on the little stage, waiting for the curtains to be drawn aside. The orchestra was playing a slow voluptuous blues. The room was crowded. She had not the remotest idea what to do; her companions had been through this a hundred times before. Loveday's knees were trembling and her eyes were misty, for—"I swear to you, Mercedes, if I hadn't been well binged up beforehand, I'd never have got through it!"

The curtains were drawn, and the empty floor-space swayed and swam before her. Clasping an enormous scarlet devil, which had been her plunder from the evening before at a night-club supper-party, Loveday walked slowly around. "Hell! It's worse than acting on a stage!" Supposing anybody she knew was present—of course, there must be, at Ciro's. She was quite sure that she heard an exclamation: "*Look*, that's Loveday!" surprised, amused, scornful, from more than one table. Supposing Mummy were there, having unexpectedly arrived in London! Supposing she were to throw down her red devil and rush across to Mummy! hide her head in her mother's lap, and sob! Between champagne and terror and the emotional caress of the music Loveday was wildly hysterical. She never knew how she survived the exhibition, but she did it for two more nights at a fiver a time, and then was offered a permanent job as mannequin to the same firm, which she refused.

That was the largest sum she ever earned; but there were occasional guineas in crowd work for the films; and half a dozen times she was hired as professional dancing-partner at the Beverley Hotel; but this did not please her mightily. It kept her too busy turning down unnecessarily pressing offers for the future from duds and rabbits who paid for her services in the present.

Loveday and Mercedes were beggars, and they lived like lords and ladies—an art in itself. Loveday was planned for just such artistry. She did not fall in love; she did not flop

over into sentiment; unembarrassed, she could accept presents; and was fearless of all consequences, because they were clearer than daylight to her, and, given the wit, as easy to avoid. "It's only in the dark," she said, "that you bump your shins!"

Whenever her creditors pressed her too seriously, she borrowed money on the hundred pounds due to her on her twenty-first birthday; punctiliously she scrawled I O U's for these loans, which must have amounted to about three times her future capital. Like Atalanta running in a paper-chase, she ran scattering I O U's in her wake—a cloud of drifting white fragments. "I shan't have any more than thirty or forty pounds left out of my hundred," thought Loveday, once or twice, disconsolate at the fickle behaviour of money that would not stay with her longer than an hour.

But, tumbled and unruly as she might have appeared in any formal series of pictures representing the life of a rake of the twentieth century, yet she did actually and innocently enjoy herself. She was free—disciplined neither by her mother, nor by conscience, nor by heartache; and laughing at all three. Only doing obeisance to a spasmodic wisdom of an instinctive god that would not be dethroned.

One day, not far from Christmas, when Loveday was very broke indeed, she met George Wayburn in Shaftesbury Avenue. Wayburn was the proprietor of a dance restaurant which had started only that autumn. It became the fashion, and filled its tables every night. He had the good sense to provide an excellent cabaret show and to keep within the law over drinks. George said: "I've got something for you, Loveday. Just your line. Come along tonight wearing your smartest. Bring Mercedes if you like, though she doesn't go down as well as you. Don't know why; she's prettier. Slops over too easily, I think."

"What's on, George?"

"Swindon's giving a supper party. Bachelor supper. Most of them married men, I expect. Eleven o'clock. And he asked me to provide some nice girls. I'm fond of you, Loveday. You're a good kid, and I'd like you to have a chance. . . .

Swindon, mind!" added George, mysteriously. "I'm busy now. I've lots to see to. Good luck. Keep your head if anything's doing!" He hurried off.

Loveday walked slowly against the tide, for it was the matinée hour, and the crowd were all rushing in the opposite direction to hers. She did not notice; she was thinking hard. She wished she had refused this slapdash invitation of Wayburn's; even now, she badly wanted to refuse it. Was she being a fool? Loveday's greatest dread was that of being a fool. Her nurse used to call her "pernickety" when she toyed with her food and pushed away her plate. Lord Swindon, whom George had mentioned with all the reverence accorded to cheap gods sitting on papier-mâché pedestals, Swindon was what would have been known in Georgian days as a beau; in Victorian days as a swell; in Edwardian days as a knut. He had a great deal of power, no principles, plenty of money, and a pull with the Press, and was leader of fashionable crazes. It was a mighty thing to be in Swindon's set.

Loveday felt that she was not getting on fast enough in her profession—a slightly indefinable profession, to be sure, but the apotheosis and the final achievement was vaguely represented, to Loveday's vision, by a sort of glorified Gaby de Lys, without Gaby's amorous history. Loveday saw a creature supremely and gloriously feminine, with all the subtlest feminine art and wisdom in her possession, without, however, needing to use them, but commanding, by dint of being peerless, expensive, and hard-hearted, all the riches of the world. She did not realize at all how childish and naïf was this idea; but it did occur to her, now, that she was not very near to it, and that Swindon's supper party might be a step upwards in the steep marble staircase to the summit. What, then, prevented her from enthusiastically accepting? She rushed back to her rooms to string together her expensive rags into some sort of an effective whole to wear that night. She thought all the time of the way George had said: "He asked me to *provide* some girls." To be provided! As though she were a slave who danced at a clap of the hands to amuse

some imperious and fickle master. To be provided to dance at a clap of the hands from Swindon, who was a bit of a swine, and his half-drunken companions. "Provide some girls. . . ." "Right, Loveday'll do for one." Loveday's pride tingled. But she was being a fool; she was letting down her own philosophy. The exchequer was empty—worse than empty. She was still at the bottom, and there's always room at the top—of the marble staircase.

Sternly Loveday taunted herself with being a coward. She hoped that if she made it sufficiently clear to herself that it was from motives of pure funk that she jibbed at tonight's party—silly maidenly funk!—she could whip up the right show of spirit, the right sort of gallantry. For, after all, what could they do to her, these men of Swindon's supper party? She knew it backwards, the A B C of the male out for pleasure. She could cope with it all, and then come home laughing, having sacked the city.

Loveday said: "I dare you to go, Loveday!"

And still hating it, she went.

CHAPTER II

YOUNG PLUTO

THE men of Swindon's supper party all looked alike to Loveday at first, as a dozen men in evening dress are rather apt to do. The host did not suggest that any of the girls "provided" should join them at supper. The lordly programme was, evidently, for them to sup first, and then, when they were ready to dance or to be amused, Wayburn should bring forward his troupe.

"I'm biding my time," said Loveday to Mercedes, embroidering a flippant cover for her real anger at this treatment. "We've come down in the world with a zonk, Mercedes; but we'll go on saying: 'I'm biding my time' under our breath, and we shan't feel such crawling worms. I'm going to give a supper party here one day, and have men 'provided' for my amusement; only then, of course, they'd be *gigolos*, not Swindon & Co. *What* a crowd!"

"Two or three of them don't look so bad," murmured Mercedes, whose pride was more phlegmatic than Loveday's.

An hour later the metaphorical clap of the hands brought them, with four or five others of Wayburn's choice, to the disarray of Swindon's supper-table. Loveday, as she walked forward, feeling uniquely and impossibly tall, and looking extremely disdainful, again envisioned the sudden presence of Mrs. Trevelyan in the room; the sudden glare of her round blue eyes; the sudden shocked exclamation of "*My* daughter!" . . . She had formed an uncontrollable habit of thus mentally placing Lamb-Bird in any assembly where she would be most easily shocked, ever since Mrs. Trevelyan's departure and the beginning of this sort of anti-Mummy life. Mummy had been at Ciro's, that time; and Mummy had been in Bobbie's

flat, and on that eccentric night-drive to Tunbridge Wells; Mummy looked singularly out of place on all these occasions, and certainly she did not look as though Swindon's party suited her better. "It's all right, Mummy"; Loveday pacified the invisible presence. "I can look after myself. It doesn't matter what their lay is. . . . I'm not going to!"

The man on her right, whom she was supposed to be entertaining, pushed back his chair and said: "Let's dance, shall we? I've not yet got the hang of this new stuff, but still—"

Loveday, not encouraged towards the Charleston under these circumstances, replied, sweetly: "I'd much rather talk; you look as though you had had such an interesting life!"

"Can you see it in my eyes?" with jocular deprecation.

"Under them," said Loveday.

He glanced at her, doubtfully. Loveday knew at once that she was not going to be a success at this party. Mercedes cuddled down into the midst of it, with her usual lack of resentment. Loveday felt vicious. What did it matter? . . .

"Don't know about that. Expect you could teach me a lot," said the man at last, with a short, uncomfortable laugh. "Where've you learnt it all, eh?"

"Learnt what?"

"Why, the hang of things!"

She shrugged her shoulders. "At school; and on the Riviera."

"Riviera" was a word he knew. "And what were you doing on the Riviera?"

"Leading a fast life," replied Loveday, using the quaint old-world idiom.

He burst into a shout of laughter. "That's good. Going a hot pace, eh? And how old were you when you began?"

"Seventeen," replied Loveday.

The man on her other side said: "I was sixteen. Will you dance with me?"

This time Loveday did not say: "I'd rather talk, you look so interesting!" although this time it happened to be true.

The dance was nearly over. When the music stopped,

he did not suggest an encore, nor a return to the supper-table; nor did he query, helplessly: "What shall we do now?" He seemed quite certain what they should do.

"We'll go and sit in the garden."

She looked at him, incredulous. Here the conventional phrase was comic. It suggested the old-fashioned dance; programmes with pencils hung on blue and white cords; the hostess who had had a few pretty Japanese lanterns strung up for the young people, round the arbour. But her partner seemed to know his way about.

"I suggest you fetch your cloak," he said.

"But it's quite warm tonight," protested Loveday.

"Hot as blazes," he assented. "The ninth of December and simply tropical. But fetch your cloak—you'll need it."

Loveday obeyed. Her partner pushed his way through several rooms thronged with cooks and scullions and rushing waiters; then down various narrow passages; and finally, pushing open a door, showed her what was indeed a small garden surrounded by high walls; not, as her gay imagination had been painting it, an exotic courtyard paved with mosaic, and murmurous with the music of a fountain; but a garden that actually contained a perambulator, a washing-line, a sooty lilac-bush, a couple of uncertain deck-chairs, and some cheap and drunken skittles, prostrate on the gravel.

"How did you know it was here?" This was a far more fantastic discovery, in the hectic West End of London, than any transported and artificial glories of Persia or Babylon.

"I went over the premises the time we leased them. I'm one of George's backers, you know, at the Café de Londres. It just didn't happen to get built over, this scrap. Those are the backs of the mews at the back of Exeter Street."

"At the back of the back of the back, with the backer!" murmured Loveday, entranced by the contrast of the pram and the skittles, compared with the interior of the Café de Londres. She could not even hear music; only the far-away drumming of the traffic.

"I like it," said Loveday; "it's—homely." And she re-

clined in one of the deck-chairs, indolently, as on a divan.

Her companion smiled. "Not homely from *your* memories of home, I should imagine?"

Without effort, like two canoes launched on to a rapid stream, they swirled away into a fantastic similarity of their past, when she at seventeen, and he at sixteen, had been rakes on the Riviera.

It was quite absurd that they had both been such children, such gallant, swaggering, sophisticated children. He especially, young Charles Elvaston, at sixteen, with his twenty thousand a year, and his pretty, youthful, tolerant mother—

"I was with my mother, too," cried Loveday. She summed up Lamb-Bird for him in a few vivid affectionate phrases; but Charles said:

"Yes, well—Petal was different. My mother was different."

And Loveday at once detested this mother of his, about whom he spoke in that rapt and ardent voice. How dare his mother be different! Wasn't Mummy good enough?—the right sort of mother, however wrong and fussy and preposterous?

"Do you call your mother Petal?" she inquired, idly, but with a stabbing undertone. "How funny! Like Little Lord Fauntleroy and his Dearest!"

They exchanged a look of complete enmity—an enmity which had sprung up as quickly as their friendship—over mothers, too, here in this grotesque garden, at the back of the back of Piccadilly, and straight on top of Swindon's supper party! It was so ridiculous, so—homely, that Loveday wanted to laugh already, even before he pushed in with his sombre defence: "I didn't give her the name. Everyone calls her Petal. They did before I was born. It suits her." He lapsed into a smoky silence.

Loveday leant back and studied his appearance.

"Do it out loud!" he suggested, after a few minutes.

She found this quite easy. "F," she said, "F is your letter. Formal, formidable, fastidious—frightening, rather. And fortunate. Fortunio the Fifteenth, known as The Fanatic—"

He sat up, surprised. "Whatever made you imagine that?"

She did not know. It had drifted into her head, and out again. Light eyes deeply set—all the rest of him dark: dark skin; dark hair; dark brows; dark voice, even. . . . Especially when she had stirred his anger about Petal. Damn Petal! *Beast!* thought primitive Loveday.

With a deft twist of her paddle, she brought back their canoes to the safe swift stream; to that queer six months he had spent, between school and school, at the resorts of the French Riviera; a juvenile sinner, an infant Lovelace, a disciple of that other Charles who had ruffled across the pages of *The School for Scandal.*

He had anticipated the fortune which was to come to him unconditionally on his seventeenth birthday, and the mere extent of his squandering fascinated Loveday, used to her own impecunious career. She leant towards him, her lips parted, breathless in attention, while he, with a ray of irony focussed full on his juvenile self, described a carnival feat of wine and flame, snow and flowers—incredible medley. For a lovely languid lady, notorious in her profession, and not more, perhaps, than twenty-five years his senior, had commanded him to produce "an effect" for her amusement in the carnival procession. Interpreting "effect" as "sacrifice," and perhaps with some schoolboy memory of classic Bacchanalia still humming in his brain, he had soaked the back of his car in some phosphorescent inflammable stuff, smothered the whole body in brilliant azaleas, set fire to it as the procession started, and driven it in flames down the street in front of the lady's window; six of his friends ran, three on either side, throwing on wine to drench the fire, from huge silver pitchers. This was dangerous, and it looked more dangerous than it was, so the multitude cheered, and threw flowers and confetti and streamers—and Heaven contributed a squall of livid cloud and a flutter of snow. Charles had allowed himself two minutes before he need spring out. One and a half was too much. . . . The lady herself, stirred from languor to ecstatic anguish, called out to him to alight! No other car, that year, achieved one-tenth of Charles's crazy success. Something of value had

actually been destroyed—and for purely wanton reasons—romantic reasons, then. . . . *C'est la même chose!* "*Mon Dieu*—and your car?" "Done for!" briefly, from a lordly young Charles.

—A gasp, soft and satisfied, from Loveday.

"I do believe you're impressed," he chaffed her.

Her enthusiasm receded, stammering: "Don't you— Oh but it *was* a good gesture!"

"Rather a gaudy display, surely?"

"But you *did* sacrifice the whole car!"

"Oh, if I'd quietly chopped it to pieces in the garage, nobody ever knowing—*that* might have been impressive."

"*That* would have been silly," argued Loveday, with finality.

Charles laughed at her view-point, which she shared with the people of Southern France, who had been swayed to a fever by his grandiloquent folly; by the sight of a useful car being put permanently out of action. He was sincere in saying now that he had required a hearty kicking, and could not understand why no one had kicked him. Nevertheless, Loveday found the spectacle of his boyish ungodliness not too ungodlike. The mere fact that he had been only sixteen was so impudently in his favour. Thumbs down! had he been older; an adolescent conceited creature, self-conscious, boastful. At eighteen he would have been far too young to behave as he did, and at nineteen or at twenty—but at sixteen, in an elusive sort of way, Loveday was aware of a touching element in his rakehood. It was not all composed of stuffy rooms, gambling, and large jewelled, exotic women. Life, as Charles had lived it then, streaked along at a terrific pace in the open air—low, humming, dangerous high-speed cars following the coils of the Corniche road; his small hydroplane, that skimmed the water of the harbour at Monaco, with the triumph of a winged dragon loosed from the bondage of centuries; tennis tournaments in the hot and brilliant sunshine, where the play was so fast that the eye could hardly travel in the wake of the ball; dancing, in the year of the crouching Argen-

tine tango. Sport, in the South of France, was swifter, more tigerish, more graceful and expensive, perhaps, than in a more robust England. But it was not effeminate. Loveday, who saw everything in pictures, followed the career of Charles, described by him with a sort of disparaging mockery, as though she had a seat at a procession, and he the centre of it, lean and dark, in white; an austere young votary of Carnival. Extravagant, because shortly he would have no need to be thrifty; slightly formal, even then, for he was confronted by no discipline that called for his defiance. He could do as he pleased; swimming, racing, flying by day; and by night?—Don Juan, perhaps. He did not tell her about that side of it. She guessed. She knew her Riviera, though from the Italian side; and she knew her Latin women. Don Juan . . . at sixteen. "He's beaten me hollow, at my own lay!"

"And then—?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Then I went back to school. A different school. The War had broken out. One couldn't muck about abroad any longer."

"Wasn't school—*fun*, with all that behind you?"

Most girls would have said: "Didn't you hate school, after all that?" This girl understood better. The fascination of the cool cloisters again; or, more like it, the healthy, leaping, quacking life of frogs in a pond. . . . Of course it had been marvellous fun, after he had ransacked experience from end to end, to be a schoolboy; a prefect; in the eleven. . . . All that!

"I know," Loveday cried. She was shimmering with her own reminiscences. "I went back to school, too—convent school, when I was eighteen, after we had been a year at Porto Rinaldo. Mummy thought it would do me good. Didn't you feel exactly like royalty in disguise? Nobody knew you were king or queen, but *you* knew, all the time. You remembered bits of the other time, and it kept you amused and impenetrable!"

It occurred to Charles Elvaston that it might have been even better fun to have gone back to school with this girl, if she had been a boy, as his companion. She lived so resili-

ently, with double the zest, twice the daring, of any boy he had known. Except one. He had no desire to make love to her honourably. Nor dishonourably, as Swindon and his crew would be thinking, by their long absence from the ballroom; but he wanted to acquire her as a perpetual boy, to knock about with him. Already they shared their early initiation into whatever shameless life was barred between Genoa and Cannes, along the blue curling edge of the Mediterranean.

"And in the War? What did you do in the Great War—?"

"—Daddy?" Charles supplemented her question. His eyes twinkled in their deeply carved hollows. For he realized that the child was hoping for more gaudy and heroic revelations. "Oh—I was a huge help to England. Joined up as soon as I could, in 1916, just before conscription; got appendicitis on the very afternoon I reached France. Operation—home—long convalescence. France again early in 1917. Taken prisoner three days later, and sent to a camp where I wasn't even cruelly treated, for the rest of the War."

Loveday was silent, trying hard to swallow her opinion of this tepid record. "It does look a bit as though they were snubbing you," she could not help saying, at last.

"Yes, that's just how I see it!" She *was* agile, this strange girl, in the way she sprang on to an ironic meaning. "They weren't going to let me get above myself for burning a few cars. It was too easy!"

"How old are you, now?"

"Twenty-nine."

"As young as that!" she cried, disappointed.

"Callow," Charles agreed, amused at her genial obsession that twenty-nine was young compared with her—what was it?—nineteen or twenty.

"And what do you do? What are you? You must be frightfully rich if you were able to have hydroplanes and things when you were sixteen. I suppose you've cornered something. You're the Button King or the Elevator King?"

"The Underground King, if anything," said Charles. "But I didn't corner the underground railways, myself. My grand-

father was one of the directors at the beginning of it all, in the 'nineties. He left me his fortune. I'm a barrister."

Underground King! She mused—and saw tunnels twisting and writhing away into the smoky darkness. Then she shook off the sinister suggestion. "You must be frightfully rich," she repeated, and nodded two or three times with emphatic pleasure. "It's a good thing you're rich."

"Why?" indolently. He was staring at the blank wall in front of him.

Nothing warned Loveday not to go on with her "lay."

She had just remembered that her career as a freebooter required her constant loyalty. She was apt to forget it, so she decided, ingenuously, that she would startle him by being quite open about her purposes, instead of concealing them beneath layers of false and cooing sweetness. At school she had learnt that you attain success through taking opportunity by the forelock. Here was opportunity! She was not going to be a fool, and let it gallop past.

—"Because, as you're rich," she said, "I needn't bother to stop and think, need I, and consider your wife and children or anything dreadful like that, before I plunder you?"

Directly she said it, she knew that she had been guided by her usual perverse desire to spoil a good thing before it spoilt itself.

"Plunder me?" Charles Elvaston repeated, unsmiling.—"You'll find that you're up against something rather tough. I'm rich, and I'm colossally mean."

"Are you really? Really and truly *mean?*" She could not quite make out if he were teasing her, punishing her for her candid intentions, or if he meant it. "I've never heard anyone own to being mean, before. Mean people don't; and generous people don't."

"It's not in the least a picturesque fault, is it? A man will own to being extravagant, foolhardy, thoughtless, indolent, bad-tempered—"

"Not bad-tempered; hot-tempered," interrupted Loveday.

"—But he *does* usually keep it dark if he's inclined to hang

on to his money, especially if he's well off. Perhaps he's not aware of it himself; but I am, so plunder away!" He was openly laughing at her now. "I'm on guard!"

"Do you mean," insisted Loveday, fascinated by this new problem in the male, "that if at any time you can't drive me home in your car, and give me my taxi fare instead, you'll ask me for the change next time we meet?"

"Certainly I will. And I'll get it, too! Are you living, more or less, on the change from taxi fares?"

"Partly," Loveday admitted, ruefully. She tried to justify herself: "After all, I'm a parasite, but I'm worth it! I'm amusing. Don't you think it's as good a job as any other? If one's amusing and not—not unpresentable? Men can look, and listen—"

"And not touch—is that it?"

"I don't care to be touched," said a very disdainful ice-maiden. And then she added, suddenly ingenuous again: "An unscrupulous pirate needn't be!"

So, after the quaint fashion of her generation, she slandered herself to Charles, bent on making the worst possible impression.

And Charles, in return, slandered himself to Loveday. *Noblesse oblige!*

"Then you'll not be able to afford to see much of me," said Elvaston. He stood up and put his hands in his pockets as though already sentinel over his property. His eyes challenged her. She stood up, too, long and slim and fair. . . . They had talked together in the headlong unrestrained fashion of two young Russians meeting in a novel; but, being English, had achieved such dramatic intimacy in a casual, almost antagonistic manner; they had neither sobbed nor flung their souls about. Yet all the essentials were exposed, long before it occurred to either of them to begin a stereotyped acquaintance.

"You haven't told me where you live, nor your name, nor what you do all day," Charles reminded her. "You haven't told me anything."

And she retorted, demurely: "No. . . . But directly I saw

you, I knew that you were one of those awfully reserved men who tell you all about themselves for a whole evening, and still manage to go on looking reserved!"

Charles flashed her a look; a glowing, brilliant look of such unholy innocence as though for a second he had taken her deeply into his confidence; as though he had been caught out, but didn't mind.

And Loveday knew a pang of despair. She could have withstood Charles Elvaston, perhaps, until he had looked like this; but when he looked like this, all that voluntary chastity of which she was so proud drained away out of her finger-tips and out of her toes; drained away, and her strength and valour with it. She was left defenceless.

—"Damn!" thought Loveday, ripping off her clothes, up in her room that night; and paying no heed to Mercedes' narrative of minor successes. "Damn. *Damn!* I'm done!"

Irrelevantly, once again she began to be afraid of Petal; of Charles' mother, as well as of Charles. As though one conqueror were not enough! She was frightened of her own uncanny divinition. Whenever he mentioned Petal, it showed her Petal's real motive, the little heap of ashes encircled and hidden by a flame-ring of Petal's own lighting. When, for instance, he had praised his mother for being perhaps the one mother in the world who could have understood a boy who had demanded abruptly, at the most critical point of his education, to be taken away from school, she had asked him no questions; simply arranged it, and taken him with her to the Riviera. . . . "Yes," Loveday had argued, silently, "yes, but as she didn't care two hoots about his education, and as it amused her to startle his guardian and his headmaster, and as Petal is a woman who can't—" oh, she knew it, she *knew* it!—"can't be without a male escort wherever she goes, and as she was in the precarious position of divorcing her husband, then Charles was the perfect and conventional answer to her problem. A charming, handsome, creditable son, with good manners and lots of money of his own, who adored her without ever stopping—" But Loveday herself had to stop

here, bemused at the fluent spinning of her brain. How *could* she know all this, who had never met Charles' mother, and had only heard her spoken of twice? How could Loveday, who was not normally a cat, so easily interpret the cat-walk—soft pads stepping softly in the sun?

She was already in a panic about Petal. Petal would know her at once for an iconoclast. So Petal would hate her. She was in a panic, too, about her oath, her crumbling, sliding toppling oath that she would not let herself be hindered, that she would care for no man, as marble-hearted she climbed the marble staircase of her dream. Most of all, she was in a panic because already she had been a fool with Charles. She had talked to him from the wrong angle; met him on the wrong side of things—a girl who lightly allowed herself to be summoned by a clap of the hands, for the delectation of Swindon and his party.

—Was *that* what Mummy had meant? All that rubbish about: "You never know where it might lead you!"? And Loveday thought, suddenly: "I believe mothers *have* hit on the right formula, but they haven't the brains to tell us the right reasons for it. It's we who have to find those." She had supposed her mother was warning her against bad men who spring on you in taxis, that sort of old-world stuff! But . . . it couldn't be possible, could it, that when Mummy had talked about a young girl having to be careful—and Loveday had hardly listened!—that she could have meant careful on what side of things you were when, by hazard, you might meet Charles Elvaston?

CHAPTER III

"THE MAN WITH A LOAD OF WORSHIP"

CHARLES ELVASTON, as he smoked his pipe that night, meditated with grim amusement on how Loveday had hurled herself against his most impenetrable steel, on their very first encounter. Rather hard luck on her, for how could she know? Most men were lavish enough, men with twenty thousand a year, and no ties or responsibilities. Nor did he care how he showered money, actual money, in his wake; but never again, oh certainly not again, since that ghastly awakening over Dion, would he allow anyone to be affected by what they might hope to get out of him. So he had warned Loveday.

Never again. Timon of Athens was only befooled once. Charles could still hardly bear to recall his own raw state of misery when, a Timon of sixteen, and all the Riviera for his Athens, he had discovered treachery, and celebrated the bitter discovery in a long, flamboyant orgy: a ruthless carnival, and no intention of Lent to follow it. He derided his childish flamboyance cruelly enough, in retrospect, but—God! there had been an excuse! Or rather, not God. . . . No God and no friend! Not ever again!

For if a rake, at sixteen, he had at least not been a *poseur*. You do not scoff at the mood of a man who breaks out into some fanatical display when his world lies in ruins around him. And was it any less ruined for a boy? Was it fair to laugh at the boy? He had been finally mature in his disillusion, though not in his years. Who questioned the age of Timon of Athens when he hurled his best dinner-service in the faces of the sycophants and went grumbling and growling into the desert? Yet Timon must have had an enormous ca-

pacity for friendship, for the reversal to have been so agonizing. And Charles—Charles had an enormous capacity for worship.

He still had it, but he had moved his altar.

Even now he could not quite remember on what point they had quarrelled, he and Dion Truefitt; the cause had been a mere flying shred in the eruption which precedes earthquake.

Dion was a year older than Charles, the son of Charles' guardian. When Charles was two, his father had died. When he was three, his mother had married again. From being Harriet Elvaston, she became Harriet Soper. It was a pity, for she so loved all her surrounding fitments to be delicate and exquisite: her shoes, her writing-paper, her luggage; certainly her name. Harriet hardly mattered, for appreciative friends had re-christened her Petal; but Soper—Mrs. Soper? Ah, well, there must have been compensations in Frederick Soper. He was in the Customs; and Petal went back with him to China after his long leave, leaving her only son with the Elvaston grandfather.

A year later, when Charles was four, for at this period every year brought an event for him, his grandfather died. Charles inherited his fortune. By the terms of old Mr. Elvaston's will, the boy, at seventeen, was to have complete control of some three hundred thousand pounds. It is difficult to say by what acts of wisdom and discretion the baby Charles had managed to impress his grandfather with the conviction that at seventeen he could be trusted to administer his own wealth. He had been probably a very sober baby, already formal, formidable, and fastidious. . . . Loveday was a genius over first impressions. And a lunatic over subsequent ones.

Pending the return of Mrs. Soper, Charles had been left to the temporary guardianship of a third cousin in the Elvaston family; Herbert Truefitt, a blunt, admirable business man, with a wife in the Celtic-Twilight line, and one son, Dion. With the lean and solemn ecstasy of a born devotee, Charles very soon laid all his possessions, material and spiritual, at Dion's feet. Dion gaily swooped them up.

Gradually, as Dion abandoned himself to religion, he revealed it to Charles—as a sort of unruly Catholicism, with pagan rites leaping processionally and unreproved through the dim cathedral. So Charles' religion became likewise a sort of unruly Catholicism, with pagan rites leaping processionally and unreproved through the dim cathedral. He had no existence apart from Dion. There was Dion on his knees before God; there was Charles on his knees before Dion—and before God. That was the grouping of it. The worship of God ought to have included Dion. But it worked out the other way round. Dion's altar—and make room for God's in the annexe!

Not that Dion was a highly coloured sham; he was at moments truly inspired. You could almost see the white flames licking straight up, drawn by a strong draught, high and heavenwards. Out of his eloquence he made belief a constant excitement for his young companion. His temple expanded or shrank; now there was room in it for God and also for all the genial gods; now barely room for the one God, terrible in His exactions. Now, Dion himself was Saint Sebastian; now, Ignatius Loyola. And now again, Denys d'Auxerrois, the Bacchanalian boy. But always he was that Dion who could plausibly explain his own inconsistencies. For he had the gift of tongues. An extremely picturesque creature. And, in his offtimes from feeding an ardent convert, completely without any fundamental sense of decency. His principles staggered and fell about like poor skaters on a vast ice-field. He was a reckless spender, and his father was not rich; so he spent Charles' present allowance of a hundred pounds a year. Charles was content that it should be so.

But Dion's one weakness lay in not knowing that he could rely on this. He still used the word "borrow" instead of "give"; he was still a little tentative, where he might safely have been bold. Dion's method was not to approach Charles with: "Look here, I want the Taj Mahal; get it for me!" but instead: "Look here, you want the Taj Mahal, don't you? I wish you'd get it. . . . And, by the way, you might lend it to me for a day

or two, when you've done with it yourself. I'll give it back." He never did give anything back, so the first method would have served.

The affection between them, devout on Charles' part, careless on Dion's, was never put into any form of words. They kept to the usual reticences of their age and nation, wholly English Charles, and English-laced-with-Celtic Dion.

They were sent to the same preparatory school; and then both of them went to Winborough. They had been over two years at Winborough before reaching the climax and the end of friendship. *What* was their big quarrel about? . . . Some religious point—some severe ethical question of conduct—terribly important, no doubt, for they were at that age when, if you think of God at all, you think about Him furiously and majestically. The discussion raged on and off for two whole days; Dion eloquent; Charles passionate, and, as he believed, also eloquent, far more equal to Dion's oratory than he usually was. . . .

"We must have been comic little cusses," Charles could reflect, but only many years afterwards.

Quite suddenly and dramatically, Dion capitulated. He owned that Charles was right, the altar of God was not just *there*, it was just *here*—or whatever the quarrel had been about. Yes—Charles had succeeded in convincing him. The younger boy was triumphant. Never before had he come out victor in such a contest, he, a mere disciple; but he had been so fervently sure of being right that Dion's opposition was agony. Dion could not be allowed, *must* not be allowed, to remain in that state of obstinate fighting blindness. A long tussle, the last little twist of argument . . . and then, quickly, like a conjuring trick, like magic, it was all over, and here was Dion acknowledging himself wholly in error. This much Charles had been able to do for his friend. As good, almost, as making a convert!—Charles strutted a bit, spiritually.

It was a boy in his own form who crudely blurted out to him, in the way of schoolboys, what yet another boy had been told by Dion himself, and what anyway they all knew, and

had known for a long time: that Dion valued Charles for what he could get out of him—that Dion sucked up—the phrase used then, remained quivering behind, every syllable unsoftened—that Dion, in brief, sucked up to Charles for good hard sums of cash down; that Dion had been boasting of his own cleverness in that, two days ago, in the very heat of a row with Charles, he had had the good sense and expediency suddenly to drop the contest and give in; to pretend that Charles had convinced him; because, in urgent need of a rather bigger loan than usual, he feared that by staunchly upholding his own side he would jeopardize his chance with Charles of—what was needed—a pound? five pounds?

That was all. Two altars at a crash. Belief in God; belief in Dion, who believed in God; but so little that he would not uphold Him at the risk of sacrificing thirty pieces of silver.

Charles, at twenty-nine, still could not dismiss the episode as pompous or trivial, though he knew it to be both; it still seared him that Dion could have thought that by sticking honestly to his own side in a quarrel, Charles would meanly refuse him an irrelevant five pounds afterwards. Wearily he had dragged away his load of worship from the front of the twin altars where it had laid. Wearily, having nowhere else to put the load, he tried to rid himself of it. Charles was not aware, then, of his persistent faculty.

It added to his torture that it was being watched, with amused and malicious comments, by quite a lot of boys who had hitherto envied Dion his conveniently rich benefactor.

Charles was not naturally proud, but he had to develop pride to face his humiliation. Yes, they had all seen him fooled. School was unendurable for him. Dion did not care; why should he? *He* retained his God, who was a great comfort to him in bleak times of trouble. *He* was the astute hero, not the victim of the episode. It was true that Charles had—insulted him!—that is to say, Charles had sent him a cheque for fifty pounds, in an envelope, without a word. Dion, laughing, accepted the useful insult. "But I believed he would

just have managed to send back the fiver," reflected Charles, turned cynic. Noble disdain stopped short and trotted backwards at ten times five!

Stay on at Winborough and bang into Dion every hour?—"I can't bear it!" Charles had just contrived, so far, to maintain his appearance of cold composure, but at any moment it might break down. The minutes were like sand in his mouth.

Three months before, he had heard from his mother that she was coming home to England. Also that she was going to divorce Mr. Soper. His interests, then, had been so focussed on Dion and on Winborough that he did not bother much about the news except to wonder vaguely what his unknown stepfather had been up to. His mother was a stranger, too, as far as he was concerned. Mr. Soper was awarded leave from his profession only every seven years; and last time leave had been due, Petal had just recovered from an illness and had been too frail for the journey home.

Now, into the abnormal whirl and dry clatter of his psychological monsoon, she arrived to visit her son; young, charming, ready to hide the sentimentality of reunion under any pretty whimsical airiness that a school boy of sixteen might prefer.

—Charles said: "Take me away from here. I want to leave. For good. Never mind why. *Please* never mind why. I've *got* to leave. I can't stand it!"

After catastrophe, a miracle. Petal had indeed, swiftly and tactfully, taken him away from Winborough and from his important Winborough education. She had taken him away from school at sixteen, at the very beginning of the spring term. She had dared to wage war on behalf of what looked like a boy's idle impulse, with Charles' other guardian, a violently disapproving Herbert Truefitt, who had never heard of such a thing in his life. . . . "The lad's not in a scrape, that I know of. He was getting on excellently. Such madness, to give in to him! It may damage his career for ever!" and so forth, at great length. Charles trembled in case she should yield to

common sense. Could there be such a marvel, in this hard block of the universe, as a mother who would continue to set a schoolboy's caprice against these practical issues thundered at her head by practical business men? Had she really understood that he was in Hell, and Winborough the Hell of Hells? Or would she attempt to reward her own tolerance, afterwards, by asking him questions; probing with little sharp hooks, curiously, to drag up what must remain rotting and hidden?

Petal had her own way. In spite of headmasters and Herbert Truefitt she removed her son from Winborough. She took him with her to the Riviera. She asked no questions.

And Charles worshipped. You could almost hear the thud of his load as he set it down in front of her.

CHAPTER IV

DUSTY SPARROWS

MERCEDES said to Loveday: "Have you heard about poor Melville Farquhar?"

But Loveday was half-way through a letter from her mother and only answered absently: "Yes, I've often heard of her; I don't know her, do I? Or was she in the ghastly mob at the Double Cutlet the other night?"

"I didn't say 'of her'; I said 'about her.' You might listen, Loveday; I always listen when you tell me things!"

"Score to me! It means that I tell them so much better than you. Everybody's *got* to listen when I tell them things. What about Melville? Is she dead?"

"My dear!" Mercedes spoke dramatically, with her mouth full of roll; she was breakfasting in bed; but Loveday had brought in her post, and was sitting, in a black silk male dressing-gown, and mules, over the gas-fire, with her coffee and letters. If asked whence she had acquired the dressing-gown, she would reply almost truthfully that she had forgotten. There had been a motor drive after a late night at the Double Cutlet, and an impromptu breakfast with two of their gang who had a cottage by the sea. . . . Borrowings, and a long day's sleep, and a mix-up of suit-cases. . . . Anyway, Loveday emerged with this very beautiful Burlington Arcade garment of black brocade patterned with a faint thread of gold. Some nice man, she reflected sunnily, was consoling himself with her old torn and scrumpled violet thing that had belonged to Mummy first, and actually had lace on it!

"My dear," Mercedes repeated, her mouth empty now, save for scandal. "That dreadful man who runs her has given her the chuck. She's simply broken-hearted; he was so fascinating.

I shouldn't be surprised if she didn't take an overdose of something. I wonder if I ought to go to her? We're not really great friends, but I know just what it feels like—I mean, I don't know what it feels like to be jilted; I hope no man will ever treat *me* like that, but I know what it is to want to commit suicide—often, Loveday, when you haven't noticed. You take things so flippantly, don't you? That time after Gerald went off—"

"Darling, instead of sitting about and looking like a drowned pierrot, if you'd got him back his white piqué waistcoat from the cleaners, he'd have been with you now. But it's not worth veronal, anyway, considering he's three back!"

Mercedes was offended. "I don't know what you mean by 'three back,'" she sulked.

"Dar*ling*, go on telling me about Melville Farquhar. Your friends' misfortunes seem to keep you sweeter-tempered than your own. It's the same with all of us: they're so easy to bear, and we can be so wise and comforting!"

"My dear! The most amazing coincidence! Swanny Betts was telling me all about it last night—you know, the lad I met at Swindon's party—and I'm sure he said that the name of poor Melville's man was the same as the man you were so taken with at the same time. Doesn't it all fit in as though there were something in something, after all?"

Loveday achieved a look of complete indifference, for, spoilt as she was in conquest, she could not forgive Charles Elvaston for having left her for five whole days now, without a word, without the most tentative suggestion that they might meet again.

"Do you mean Charles Elvaston?" she began, coldly.

"Yes, that was it; that was the name of Melville's man. Charles Elvaston. . . . And he was quite too marvellously rich, my dear, so that it means that now Melville will have to alter her whole style of living, unless he's left her enough to keep her going in the same style, and that's not likely. Loveday, what are you looking so transfixed about? You're spilling your coffee, too. . . ."

For the world had suddenly become luminous to Loveday. Mercedes' chatter had penetrated, at last, with its glorious revelation. Charles Elvaston had thrown up his mistress suddenly, unexpectedly. None of his friends seemed to know why. He had thrown up his expensive and well-groomed mistress; and yet he was not a capricious type of man. Loveday sat hugging her knees, one leg scorching in front of the gas-fire, her coffee tilted over her mother's letter, rapt, unheeding. . . . As Mercedes had said, there was something in something, after all. Otherwise, why should Charles have thrown over his mistress directly after meeting Loveday for the first time? So it had not counted against her that she had appeared the sort of girl who could be "provided" for Swindon's parties? He had been able to see beyond that; he had been able to see that she was really the kind that had a nice fussy, protective mother. How effective was Lamb-Bird in absence! And how utterly devastating whenever she appeared! However, Porto Rinaldo was a long way off. It had all happened on the ninth, too, mused Loveday, blissfully. . . . "Nine is lucky for me. And he was twenty-nine; he said so. Now, if I had been nineteen instead of twenty—" for a few seconds this appeared as a tiny flaw in her perfect crystal ball of happiness. But she righted it by recalling suddenly that she had put on one stocking inside-out that morning, and had worn it like that all day, for luck's sake, though her dandyism shuddered. "So *that's* all right!"

She rang up Charles; then, at the sound of his voice, turned shy as any débutante . . . and wished she had left initiative to him. But was not his dismissal of Melville Farquhar even more telling than any lead he could have taken in the merely official matter of ringing up? He asked her to dine with him, and, still shyly, she accepted.

Loveday was wont to be a seer in the worldly wisdom of not seeming too eager. This time she did not bother about pretending, for after Charles' significant rearrangement of his entire plan of existence, for her sake, why paint her

fires to look like frost? Of course, she was not supposed to know about Melville. The best sort of girls, even if they knew that men had mistresses, were not supposed to know exactly at what hour the mistresses were thrown over. Intuition told her that in having listened to all this scandal about Melville Farquhar, she had again accidentally been placed on the wrong side of things, so far as Charles was concerned. He would always be most scrupulously unscrupulous in separating his mistress' world from the world wherein dwelt his fiancée and his wife.

But he had clearly shown, now, the violent impetuosity of a young man in love, and it flavoured her whole day, and sank through all that precious evening, so that her manner was softer with Charles, more acquiescent, than it had ever been with any man before; a new-born Loveday. Those who had previously known her for untamed, imperious, exacting, would have marvelled.

During four days and evenings she gladly allowed herself to be commanded by him whenever they met. Then, once more, Mercedes pricked the floating rainbow bubble, choosing exactly the same time, stage, and properties, even to another letter from Mrs. Trevelyan, which Loveday was reading by the gas-fire, when Mercedes spoke: "My dear, I went to see Melville last night; Melville Farquhar, you know. I told you about her." But this time she did not have to call her friend's attention twice.

"Well?" quoth a very sunny Loveday. "Loveday the Ninth, known as The Preferred," she whispered cosily to herself.

"You can see she's suffering too terribly, Loveday."

But, to tell the truth, Mercedes had been somewhat disappointed at not having found a dishevelled Melville Farquhar with veronal bottle in hand, so she remained ambiguous as to the exact nature of these sufferings. "Of course, that high-priced manicured type never *show* what they feel, except for circles round the eyes. And she hadn't even those. And she was quite willing to talk about your Charles—"

"Don't call him that," Loveday interrupted. And nervously, impatiently, her fingers sought wood.

"But, my dear, you *must* meet her. She's such a contrast to you, in lots of ways. Much older, of course—"

"I don't want to meet her."

"You needn't be jealous. After all, it's your show now, not hers."

"It's not jealousy, but I don't want to meet her."

Nothing must blemish her present happiness; it was fragile as a spell. Charles, formal, formidable, and fastidious, would hate her to meet Melville Farquhar, who, in the near past, had been his mistress. He would hate it, if he were going to—if he were going to. . . . But Loveday's superstitions would not allow her to utter the word "marry" even to herself. . . . "Except that you *have* said things to yourself very deep down, even in swearing that you won't!"

"I told her lots about you," continued tactful Mercedes.

A cup and a chair crashed to the ground.

"Mercedes, you beast! You didn't!"

"Don't get so worked up. What's the harm? I've *often* asked you to talk about me and Swanny Betts to that Amabel woman. Serve her right to hear that she's lost Swanny by carrying on with a chorus-boy."

"That's different."

"It's only different because you think it is!" Mercedes had her rare spasms of shrewdness. "Anyhow, I did talk about you and Charles. Melville and I hit it off tremendously well. It beats me why Elvaston didn't marry her. He must be amazingly generous; he's settled a lump sum on her that will bring her in about twelve hundred a year. Not bad, considering they'd only been together for four years. And yet he sounds as though he had a sort of cruelty complex, from the *way* he does things. I'm telling you all this so that you can look out for yourself, though you usually do, I must say. I've never liked to say it before, but I'll tell you now, that I think *you* were quite too brutal to poor Bobby Staples.

I told Melville so. I told her as a proof that often women treat men as badly as men treat women. I hoped it would comfort her. Loveday, are you saying your prayers? Your lips are moving!"

"I was swearing," said Loveday, briefly. God! How had she ever stuck Mercedes for so long? It was queer, though, there were whole periods when she did not seem to notice things acutely. As long as she was enjoying herself, people like Mercedes slipped about on top of her consciousness like celluloid balls on an ivory surface. But now she was sensitive to every common little thought which Mercedes produced from the shallows of her common little mind.

"Don't swear. You'll do it out loud, one day, and your haughty Charles won't like it a bit. I've noticed you getting into training for him. . . . You haven't said 'bloody' for three days. Not that it mattered, the way you said it. Thalia Danvers' boy—you know, he was a poet—said you made it sound like the result of champagne instead of whisky. Do you know what he meant? I do, in a way. I'm not the type who jibs at passing on compliments that aren't about myself—" She waited, expectant.

Disappointed of a counter compliment, she went on, after a pause: "And, talking of champagne—this is what I've been trying to tell you, Loveday, only you *will* keep on interrupting. You know, don't you, that I believe there's no such thing as coincidence, only destiny?" Mercedes sat very upright in bed and looked intently at Loveday. "Thalia's boy told me I was a mystic in spots."

"Sounds like measles!" was Loveday's lazy comment. "Where does all this thrashing to and fro lead to, anyway?"

"My dear," Mercedes brought out her climax triumphantly; "the very night that you met Charles Elvaston, do you remember?—and I met Swanny. . . . It doesn't seem like a week ago, does it? Well, that was the *very night* that he broke it off with Melville. Your Charles, I mean; not Swanny."

Loveday was subtly smiling. She had imagined the dénoue-

ment not so directly after. The next day, perhaps. Yet he must have gone straight on to say good-bye to Melville, after saying good-night to Loveday. . . .

"—Because he dined at her flat that very night, and did it, and then came straight on to Swindon's supper party. My dear! As though he felt nothing at all! That's what I meant by saying that he's brutal. My theory is . . ."

But Loveday heard nothing of Mercedes' theory. Her throat felt tight and dry. "You mean," she spoke huskily, "you mean he broke off that affair first, *before* I—before we met him at the Café?"

"That's what I'm telling you. On the very same evening. That's what I call destiny. He had only just got free from her, when you turned up in his life. Aren't you thrilled?"

—Loveday was blushing crimson. Wave after wave of hot blood poured, an agony of pricking shame, over her face and neck and throat. Mercedes stared, astonished beyond speech. It seemed as though Loveday would never stop blushing. . . .

CHAPTER V

THE PIRATE LAY

CHARLES never divined the reason for the metamorphosis in Loveday. He only saw that at one moment he had for playmate a Loveday who appeared to move through a breathless hush, fearful of disturbing it; her moods—if moods they were—melting intangibly one into another; a Loveday with happy, spontaneous devices to be pleasing to him, that, ingenuously displayed, caused him to feel tenderly that here indeed was a child, a child with a wistful desire to be—well, if not good, at least less bad than she had formerly been! This Loveday was exquisite; she was the green grass that softly glittered after showers, when the sun fell on it. . . .

This was the Loveday who believed, quite simply, that he had fallen in love with her, and therefore had banished Melville Farquhar from his life.

Then, all in a night and a day, this Loveday vanished. . . .

In her stead was a graceless ragamuffin, witty, sophisticated, fifty times more exasperating than she need ever have been, had she not tantalized him with an earlier, sweeter vision of herself. This was the Loveday who had heard that Melville's banishment was prior to her own entrance, and not, as she had glamorously supposed, the result of it. She had been deluded by an hour; had slid so easily from the right side to the wrong, into making herself—*cheap*. Cheap!—and to Charles Elvaston.

. . . She would show him, now! A new Loveday, to Charles. A Loveday who actually dared to treat him as though he were a persistent and rather boring admirer, useful at times, but entitled to no consideration whatever; as one on whom she could rely to be meek under the most shameful bullying. Openly, too, she renewed her mischievous attacks upon his

pocket-book. Charles resisted. The more stubborn he became, the more provoking she. But he had to admit that she was a good loser; that she laughed, and never resented his pugnacious and rather mocking victories. On the contrary, she had a charming, chubby way of describing his methods and hers; and why, so far, she had failed; and might it not be better if she took this and that line at the next encounter?—which Charles found most engaging, though he still regretted that brief vision of a Loveday whom she denied had ever existed.

"I expect I was feeling a bit off colour!"

One Sunday he drove her along a road through the naked beech-woods of Buckinghamshire. On a board that hangs on a wall of the Georgian town of old Amersham he pointed out to her the notice left up from an earlier period of history: a warning to rogues and vagabonds and street musicians that they would have to pay the penalty unless they could prove visible means of support.

"Doesn't that frighten you, Loveday?"

She argued: "But I've *got* visible means of support!"

"Where?"

"You!"

"Heaven forbid! I'm not supporting you! Have you ever had a penny out of me?"

Thus challenged, Loveday had to admit that she had not.

"—Not so far," she added. "One must make allowances for your principles," she conceded, graciously. "But you wouldn't see me locked up for a rogue and a vagabond, would you?"

"That's just what you are, Loveday!"

"I suppose it is. But, Charles, if I were starving?"

"Oh, I'd give you a meal; tea and cake and watercress. —No, I forgot, you won't eat watercress."

"'*My* mother *says*,'" Loveday began, leaning to the rhythm of the old nursery doggerel, "'*I* never *should*—'"

"Go on!"

"I don't know—yes, I do: '*Play* with the *gip*sies in the *wood*.'—But anyhow, Charles, why do you always laugh at me about the watercress?"

But it was not only her prim refusal of watercress that amused him. He was charmed by all her other staunch obediences to the tiny old-fashioned commandments of her mother, in the past: Never bathe on your first two days at the seaside, nor less than two hours after meals. You get fevers from books out of a public library. Don't drink water from the tap. Nor lean back in a railway carriage. Don't eat your melon right down to the rind. Always wash grapes before putting them in your mouth. And only ask policemen the way, or postmen; never men. . . .

Dozens of these little rules. And so inextricably had they wound themselves into Loveday's subconscious being that even here and now, living independently in London, the most rebellious of twentieth-century heroines, her essential actions and conduct in vehement opposition to her mother's principles, she yet refused watercress (the reason remained misty) . . . did not drink water from the tap . . . nor leant back in a railway carriage. . . .

Charles adored this trait in her; but Loveday could not see that it was funny in contrast to her sophistication.

"Anyhow, I hate cheap and stodgy teas. I must say for you, Charles, that you do me well when you take me out to dinner or supper. I wonder if—" She became thoughtful. And that night, when they were dining together, and Charles had just consulted with the wine-waiter—"We'll have a bottle of the 1920 dry Vouvray: Château Moncontour—" she produced a suggestion which suddenly had the effect of making him really lose his temper.

"It wouldn't make much difference to you, Charles dear, would it? . . . You always give me such marvellous wines, and I don't know one drink from another. Cheap fizz is quite good enough for me, and it wouldn't be such a waste."

"That's very handsome and considerate of you. Certainly, Loveday, you shall have cheap fizz in future; or ginger-ale, if you like!"

"And you'll give me the difference in hard cash? That's only fair, isn't it? Otherwise—" wheedled Loveday, not see-

ing the thunder-cloud until it burst—"otherwise you'd actually be making on me!"

. . . They parted in cold fury. And Loveday punished Charles for his unreasoning refusal to come to a square deal over the wine question, by not telling him when she left her present rooms with Mercedes and went to share another girl's flat. She actually let him wait for her in his car outside the old digs, after he had eventually made an appointment with her by telephoning her club. He waited, in icy disapproval of her unpunctuality, for over half an hour, before he eventually rang and was told of her new address. And that involved a long conversation with Mercedes, whom he detested, agreeing with Loveday that she was K.P., which apparently stood for Common Person; but not agreeing, further, that she was a good sort. Perhaps he mistrusted her friendship with Melville Farquhar. People had no business to know people when it might inconvenience him!

Loveday calmly censured him for being late when he did arrive that evening.

"Sweetheart," remarked Charles, shocked back into good humour by the brazen attitude of the hussy, "Did it occur to you to give me your new address?"

"It occurred to me, yes. But I resisted the temptation. I knew you'd find me out, somehow. It was your business to find out. And I hate untidiness, unpunctuality, forgetfulness, and lack of consideration towards others!"

"You do, do you?" said Charles, grimly recognizing the imitation—for he decidedly hated all these things. But Loveday could tousle up his sense of shapeliness and propriety with as little compunction as though she were hunting through one of her drawers for a lost handkerchief.

"I wonder how long I shall put up with such cavalier treatment, Loveday?"

"Considering you're the season's most handsome catch," she reminded him, cheekily, "why put up with it at all?"

"Because you're Loveday the First and Last, known as The

Unique," he sighed, mocking his enslavement even while he acknowledged it.

He never told her his secret name for her, which indeed was ungenerous of him, for it was just the sort of nickname which she would have relished with the utmost delight. "Debonair" he called her, when he thought of her; and "Debonair" conveyed just her favourite glint of insolence, of valiant bravado. But Charles hoarded it for fear of giving away too much of himself. It was his single romantic secret concerning her. Otherwise he still felt about her what he had felt on their very first meeting: "What a boy she would have been, with whom to have gone swinging back to school!"

Her adventures were an endless amusement to him; except every now and then, when he wanted to shake her in wrath. She could never tell the difference between these times and the others; or, perhaps, she did not care either way.

She came to him, buoyant, one day, convinced that all she cared about was work, hard honest labour at earning a living.

"Playing's played out. I'm fed up with it. I really am, this time! At heart, I'm a working one!"

It transpired that she had got a job to take a family of Americans round London, showing them all that was to be seen of the sights. She was to start the next morning.

"They're giving me three guineas a day, and paying every day in advance. That's one thousand and sixty-five pounds a year, not counting the shillings of the guineas, if they keep me on for a year, and I expect they'll get so used to me, they'll have to!"

"You're an optimist!" said Charles. "Do you know anything about the sights of London?"

"Not a thing! They'll know, probably; Americans always do."

"I thought the arrangement was for *you* to take *them* round?"

"Oh, yes, well, it was—in a way. But they'll have plenty of maps and guides and gadgets like that. They won't expect

me—Charles, they won't, will they?—to know which 'bus, or what's open, or where we turn to the right?"

"I'd rely entirely upon charm, if I were you," Charles advised her, very seriously.

Half-way through her day with the Americans, utterly bewildered and dazed by their exactions, their questions, their colossally unreasonable notions of what a pilot should know, Loveday suddenly thought: "Hell! I've had enough!" So she put them on a 'bus, bound for she knew not whither, saw them mount to the top, sprang off herself while it was going full tilt, lost herself in the crowd, and took a taxi to Charles' rooms in Middle Temple, demanding lunch, applause, and encouragement, for she was exhausted, and had decided that work was not her "lay."

Her next scheme was laid in front of Charles in the form of a sober business proposition: "You see, I'm being perfectly serious about this. I only need a backer. You like your investments to be sound, don't you?"

Charles said he was convinced that this one was sound, even before he heard it.

"Well then, will you pay up, say, a hundred pounds to start with? Will you give it to me now?"

"No," said Charles.

"You'd rather hear about it first?"

"Yes," said Charles.

The idea, as she sketched it breathlessly, her long, narrow eyes sparkling, her hands as usual vividly illustrating each sentence, was as follows: that she should be fitted up with a barrow, and glasses of all sizes, and various bottles; and that she should stand in Piccadilly every night behind the barrow, dressed in pure white linen, and shake cocktails, and sell them to the crowds pouring into the West End for dinner and the theatres.

"For I *can* shake cocktails, Charles; you told me so yourself. Of course I can charge enormous prices for them; and I'll look rather a beautiful contrast to Piccadilly, won't I? Standing there, pure and angelic, with that velvety look to

my skin. And, *of course*, my cocktail glasses will be scrupulously clean."

"Of course," Charles agreed. He would not interrupt the fantasy for worlds.

Loveday babbled on: "You know how anything new goes down! The same drinks, but served in a different way, in a different place, and you can charge double and they won't notice. That's sound, isn't it? And there'd be practically no outlay, and I'd get a wonderful reputation, like a legend—the Angel of the Cocktail Barrow. All rather quee and stimulating, and most profitable. I'm willing to let you in on the ground-floor. I know you like money," charmingly.

"A stab to the heart!" said Charles.

"Well, shall we roughly calculate what it would come to?"

They roughly calculated. One of Charles' sober pleasures was to see Loveday involved in arithmetic. When they had finished—and she took considerable pride in the fact that she had not forgotten to reckon for her laundry, as the white linen uniform would have to be spotless, to achieve the effect of purity that seemed to her so important!—then Charles gently enlightened her as to a few facts about licences. Loveday, bitterly disappointed, was inclined to argue.

"If one doesn't bother about the law—and they don't, half the time, at night-clubs—surely they'd let me run for a month or two and not interfere? I could give the policeman on the beat cocktails for nothing; we'd allow for that in the incidental expenses. I'm Loveday the Twenty-seventh, known as Stick-At-Nothing!"

"But I'm Charles the Twenty-eighth, known as Stick-At-Everything! I'm sorry, Loveday, but I won't finance your cocktail barrow in the very teeth of the law. I happen to be a barrister, you may remember."

"Would it mean that they'd unwig you, or something? Because if it's only that, I don't mind sacrificing you, Charles. All the Trevelyans are bad hats," she boasted, traducing a perfectly sound line of ancestors in order to create her roystering impression. "And I—" wistfully—"I am the last of them!"

"That's just as well, then, isn't it?" said Charles, looking on the cheerful side.

She pondered for a few moments . . . and then told him that, as he was too timid to finance her brilliant scheme, and as she had to make money somehow, being utterly broke, would he lend her a hundred pounds on the pledge of the hundred pounds that would be hers on her twenty-first birthday, three months hence. "I'll give you an I O U, of course."

"No," said Charles. He was suspicious. She had made that last promise too glibly, as though it were familiar to her lips. "How many I O U's have you already given on that hundred pounds?" he demanded, pouncing in what Loveday called his beastly professional manner.

Her mind thrashed silently between honesty and subterfuge. Honesty won.

"Two or three," she admitted. "There was one for a fiver; oh, and Bobby's; two to Bobby—oh, and—well—I can't quite remember—to Mercedes; and my third cousin, Joe. You'd like Joe. He's a sweetness."

"I'm sure I'd adore Joe. How many I O U's did you give *him?* Let's add them up and see what they come to, shall we?"

They added them up, all those that Loveday could remember; they came to £109.

"We'll double that for safety. Call it £218 that you owe. I won't lend you a hundred pounds on that security, Loveday. I never lend on a rotten basis."

"What!" she cried in heat. "With your three hundred thousand a year? Not to take a small risk like that!"

"That's my capital, Loveday; not my income!"

"It's the same thing, nearly!"

"You live as though it were. Actually, you know, it isn't. I've got to be *very* thrifty," said Charles, for the sheer pleasure of rousing her anger.

"You never do anything that isn't careful and lawyerish!" declared Loveday, in the heat of passion. "Oh, well, that means I must leave the club tonight. I was so comfortable at the club, but I can't afford their prices."

"The club? I thought you were with some girl? Gwynneth, or some name like that?"

"Oh, Gwynneth. Yes, we were pigging it together until yesterday; but I got fed up and pushed off to the club. Don't know where I shall go tonight. Life's so hard to the pure in heart. Charles, angel, would you like me and Mercedes to occupy your rooms for a bit?"

"No," said Charles.

"With you in them as well, of course; we shouldn't turn you out!"

"Mercedes! *Why* Mercedes?"

"*I* don't want her," murmured Loveday, propitiating him with her meekness and her obeisance to the conventions. "I put her in to please *you*."

"She doesn't please me!"

"Mayn't we come and live in your rooms, Charles? I'm down among the dead men, otherwise. Broke to the wide. And Mummy's cheque came yesterday, too, which makes it worse; there won't be another one for a month."

"What did you do with it?" he asked. An idea was already gathering in his mind. . . .

She slanted a look at him of tentative mischief and appeal. "Darling-angel Charles, why didn't you come to my cocktail party yesterday?"

"I was working on a brief."

"Nice big one? Murder?" Loveday always hoped that his briefs were murder. "Are you persecuting?"

Charles promptly quenched her. He refused to produce himself picturesquely for Loveday's delectation. "No, a very small one, connected with tenants' fixtures. I walked through the Ritz afterwards, as soon as I could get away, but you and your party had gone already; I imagined you would keep it up for hours."

"I broke up the party suddenly, just half a minute after the party broke me! It was rather a pity. I was feeling so well myself, such a hospitable one, frightfully dashing, you know. 'Have you heard? Loveday's giving a cocktail party at the

Ritz!'—We'd had about two each, and there was a sort of lull before I ordered another all round. I believe some angel must have put in into my waiter's head to give me my bill then, as though we'd finished. You know that sort of unobtrusive way in which you find it folded in your hand, in places like the Ritz, and never know how it got there? I gave one supercilious look at it; I was being quite too terribly duchess yesterday—And I think I became unconscious for a moment. Luckily no one noticed. Charles, did you know what champagne cocktails cost at the Ritz? Not by the dozen, you know, each? I'd reckoned on their being three bob or three-and-six at the most. I stood the shock beautifully, Charles. I did! Really, one has to make a gesture. There was just enough left out of my twelve pounds to—one doesn't *tip* at the Ritz, does one?—to bestow recognition on the waiter. Then I stood up, looking absent-minded, followed by my surprised party, who, I dare say, *would* have had another all round, and thought I'd forgotten to ask them. Thank goodness you didn't come, Charles. Unless you'd have been sporting enough to make it your party!"

"That," replied Charles, suavely, "would have been an insult to my hostess. I shouldn't have dreamed of it. How do you mean to live for the next month, child?"

"Oh, I don't know," sadly. "I shall have to fly round and get a job of work, I suppose. Oh, something always turns up. I'd like to take a suite at the Ritz. It would be a sort of retribution, wouldn't it? Could I give them your name as a reference?"

"No," said Charles.

"*Yes!* With a private bathroom of porphyry. Charles, do you know that the Pope has about fifty baths in the Vatican gallery—jasper, agate, and porphyry? It seems rather a lot for one old man, doesn't it?" Loveday, in case she should be speaking irreverently, crossed herself. "Especially as he can't use any of them; the gallery is full of tourists all the time. Wouldn't it be glorious to head a revolt, and charge in, and rip up a bath, the one you liked best, crying: 'No porphyry!' instead of 'No popery!'? Charles, I'm rather

tired of living in a mess, with a geyser that doesn't work."

Charles remembered that she had said this.

The next day, he came to her with his suggestion, and Petal's consent prettily engraven on it, that Loveday should come and stay with her for an indefinite time, in her service flat in Portman Square.

"With your mother?" Loveday spoke slowly.

"With Petal. Yes."

"But does she know all about me, and still want me?"

"What is there to know?"

"That I'm—a ragamuffin one?"

Charles explained ardently, and at some length, that Loveday's ideas about jealous old mothers were conventional and out of date, and did not apply to Petal. "I've told you hundreds of times that Petal is different."

"Yes . . ."

Loveday could not explain to him her uneasy sense that there was something unnatural about this mother who so strangely failed to resent her son's action in slinging a vagabond girl with a highly decorated reputation into her flat. By all the great laws of the earth, Petal ought not to have welcomed Loveday, smiling. She ought to be suspicious, defending her cub. At least, until she had seen Loveday. It was all very well for Charles to speak so proudly. Loveday felt irritated with him; her irritation swelled to actual dread; she longed to refuse; to go anywhere; do anything; continue with her present careless snatching of every flower that took her fancy in the free meadows. Her own mother was away; she was happy. And now Charles had come along and wanted to carry her off—carry her down. Was it any good to struggle against his command? He was so different when he talked of Petal—so frightening. Loveday stole a look at his dark face. . . .

("And besides, I love him—so what's the use of struggling?")

". . . So pack up your things," decreed Charles. "I've got the car outside. We'll go along now."

"Now?" protested Loveday, faintly. She had begun to trem-

ble, and hoped Charles would not notice. "Now? So soon?"

"That's your favourite style, isn't it, to leap into everything headlong? And Petal's just as young and impetuous as you are. She's waiting."

"Waiting?" echoed Loveday.

Charles caught Loveday by the shoulders. They were both standing; their eyes were on the same level, and there was a hard enmity between them, as on that first night in the back garden of the Café de Londres.

"What's biting you, Loveday? You'll have a glorious time with Petal; she'll give you everything you want. You won't know yourself, after all this shoddy rough-and-tumble. I've hated it for you; you know that. Aren't you being—damned silly?"

Oh, what was there about this one man that made her weak and helpless? Loveday confessed: "Yes, I know I'm damned—" then suddenly she covered her face with her hands, and cried, and could not finish her plea—her foolish plea to be allowed to remain where she was, whatever luxury might await her in Petal's flat. She tried again: "I suppose I *am* damned—" but she was afraid of losing him unless she yielded.

So she went with him, in his forty-horse-power black Bentley.

CHAPTER VI

CHARON'S FERRY

THE world went suddenly silent as they drove into the courtyard and up to the great doors of Lethburnham Mansions; for these were highly expensive flats, and the approach was paved with rubber and roofed in with glass, through which the grey light of a London street filtered even more wanly.

Loveday felt as though she were leaving the upper air behind her. And as the door of Petal's flat opened and closed again, a strange fact occurred to her, like a shaft of terror striking across her heart: "I'm cleaned out; I haven't got a sou!" During all those times when she had lived taking whatever money was handiest and not knowing what shillings might be available the next day, and the day after that, during all those weeks of her gay London carnival, she had plunged her hands into her empty pockets and had swung along, debonair, wondering why people worry? But now, when at last all her comforts for the first time were assured to her, when a soft bed was ready, and four good meals a day spread without asking for payment, now she was acutely and sensitively aware that her last coin was gone. And she was frightened of being penniless—and in captivity. "How am I going to get away? How in hell am I ever going to get away?"

Charles cried triumphantly: "And here's Petal!" . . .

Had he really added: "And isn't she wonderful?" or had Loveday merely guessed it from the suppressed shout of pride in his voice?

But that night, after they had dined, and before he returned to his own rooms in the Middle Temple, he actually did say it, left alone with her for a few moments in Petal's sitting-room, which was decorated in tints of moonstone and jade,

with lamps that glowed mysteriously, shut up in frail balls like fire-opals.

—"Isn't she wonderful?"

But Loveday was sulky, and refused to be anything but politely acquiescent; she agreed with him that her hostess was simply too charming, and too divinely pretty; but it was not Loveday speaking, only Petal's guest. Loveday was sulking bitterly on behalf of her own mother. She resented Charles' mother, who looked so young, and was so finely lodged, and cared for her son with so little fire that she could be courteous to this entering robber-girl. Poor darling Mummy, who was always, Loveday remembered, in a fury and a flurry and a mess! You could believe it of Loveday's mother that in middle age she had brought forth her child, and not without great pain. But Loveday was certain that Petal, at eighteen, had borne Charles so prettily that it hardly stirred the air. Petal knew how to manage life; undoubtedly, in her motherhood, there was nothing of the scarred earth, its doubt and toil and battle and slow labour towards fruitfulness. "It isn't her lay, being motherish," thought Loveday. Petal's "lay" was in knowing just exactly what to reject; her emotional management was exquisite. Supposing she had put herself in the wrong with Charles, and with Loveday, by grudging hospitality to the girl, preceded by some madly tiresome scene of jealousy? At once and swiftly the two of the younger generation would have formed an alliance and left her out. But she had been adorable to Loveday, and Charles had adored her for it, and everyone would adore her, and say: "Isn't Petal wonderful?"

"Give me a natural darling *beast* of a mother!" thought Loveday, frantically. God! What was it going to be like, boxed up here in these sunless splendid rooms, alone with Petal?

CHAPTER VII

PERSEPHONE IN HELL

SHE was shut up with an altar and an idol—and could not worship.

She was a drift of daylight, bewildered, dazed, not knowing her way about among the brilliant illumination. . . . Lost daylight. . . . Loveday was lost. Sometimes she chid herself for her state of horror: "You're just imagining it; you're quite happy here; you're imagining things!" A son devoted to his mother, and—honest now, Loveday, honest!—and a girl in love with the son, and therefore jealous of his devotion. . . . Was she in reality only suffering from the identical jealousy that Lamb-Bird felt about Judith, for instance? Was Loveday like her mother, and too dishonest to own it? Capable of being as irrevocably rude to Petal as Mummy one day might be—Loveday always dreaded it!—to Judith?

And what was the matter with Charles? He was showing off, showing off all the time; showing off Petal. Yet not in his natural tones, but in a queer put-on voice, ardent, rapt. Petal noticed nothing strange, but perhaps she was used to the mechanism; it apparently never broke down; nor did she appear ever to find it too much for her common sense; fatuous, fulsome. . . . Who had said F was his letter? Loveday herself, joking, before ever he dragged in Petal. . . . Fatuous, fulsome. . . . Frightening. He had never been so frightening as now. "What's he doing it *for?*" She wanted him back again as she had loved him: formal, formidable, fastidious—priggish qualities, she might have called them once, these F's. Oh, but he had been so *decent.* She mourned for his decency; shrinking from his attitude and voice with Petal, as though she had

to look on at a soldier of Cromwell's Ironsides disguising himself with guitar and lovelocks.

The showman act. . . .

And then, in one startling second, he revealed to her what she had dimly suspected:

He was absorbed in some reading, and Loveday came into the room. He did not notice her entrance. She asked him an irrelevant question. Automatically, as though a spring had been touched, he answered in his "Petal voice": "Quite right as usual, darling!" and went on with his reading.

Loveday, her heart thumping as though she had seen a dead man sitting up alive, swiftly went out of the room again.

"He doesn't care a damn for her."

"It goes on working—that voice—even when he's off guard."

"If he worshipped Petal, up to the pitch he pretends, he'd know the difference between us, even without looking up from his book."

"Then what—*what* is he doing it for?"

Once again she groped among the enmuffling shadows; bewilderment choked her perceptions. "Why does he keep it up? I believe he knows as much about it as I do. Then what's his lay? Perhaps he'll give me a signal; perhaps I can force through to him, next time he's doing it; bore a hole through and get a signal: that sudden, innocent, glowing smile, and the intimate caught-out, don't-tell flash in his eyes. . . . Oh, if he *would!* . . ."

"Not a hope. He'd have to give up entirely, if he once let me through, or anyone else. . . ."

"*What* would he have to give up?—Oh, I don't know. I can't explain."

Petal was easy, compared with Charles. With steady contempt Loveday recognized Petal. "She manages beautifully; not a flaw anywhere. She never says: 'Oh, well, another dead bottle!'"

"But she dare not come face to face with Petal. Doesn't like herself enough. Petal-to-my-friends! Petal-in-the-Right! But she pulls it off. I suppose because it is unconscious. Oh, she's

clever; she's clever. No—it's an instinct. Self-preservation of Petal. And it requires Charles—and that voice of his. She doesn't actually care a damn for Charles, except as her—her trumpeter, her showman, her bell-man . . . running always in advance, clearing the way: 'Oyez! Oyez!' Pretty useful, from Petal's point of view. While Charles is clearing her way, praising her up, telling anecdotes about her, calling attention to her points, exaggerating her tiny little rotten sorrows and the marvellous way she's borne them, repeating what other people have said about her, getting her from the right angle all the time, the right tender-yet-merry martyr's light on her . . . why, she needn't bother to do any of that herself! She can just lie back and rake in the profits; she can afford to keep cool and sweet; she can afford to be modest . . . she knows it won't be allowed! Petal! . . . Petal hasn't got to rush round about herself, and get hot and bothered as we have to do, without a Charles. And there's no relief; he's hypnotized all her friends, too; they all rush in and out and talk about her in queer voices."

"And now me. I'm part of her—profits. Suppose she had objected to me, as Mummy would have done in her place . . . a little barbarian! ne'er-do-well! out for what she can get! Out to grab my son. . . . Can't I just imagine Mummy! She'd be too awful, of course! But she'd be right. Petal—Petal ought to be protecting her son, instead of being so preoccupied about being the right sort of wonderful mother in *his* eyes! Never a nuisance! Never spouting the old-fashioned conventions at him.—But it's just that she doesn't care a tinker's cuss what happens to him, as long as *she* appears to advantage . . . stained-glass windows behind her head! Mummy would have seen to it that such a designing minx as Loveday was kept out of the flat; so she'd have appeared an utter beast, and her son Charles would have been bored to death with her. But Petal's adorable to him, and doesn't look after him, and invites me to her flat, and so she rakes in this haul, too. One up on me, with Charles! Generous Petal, to like Loveday! Unappreciative Loveday, not to melt in front of Petal!"

"She never makes a mistake—never."

"And if she did, he'd put it right with himself."

"He didn't want me here. Not *me*. Not for myself. He wanted an audience for this Petal business. Someone who couldn't get away from it. Charles is using me. He's cruel. Something's gone rotten inside him. . . . A lie for his bedfellow—"

"He might have had—me."

"I could just bear it if he really had a grand rave on Petal; I should ramp round and thrash about, but I could bear it. Sons *are* devoted to their mothers, sometimes. But it's none of it *true*."

"He'd never marry a girl who didn't help him out with his lay. Can I pretend well enough? Shall I sing a song of Petal? *No*—" cried Loveday, in violent reaction—"no . . . I'm *not* going to be mixed up with their—their blessed Elvaston lay!"

> "And she who would this health deny,
> Down among the dead men
> . . . Let her lie!"

"Things are very difficult for you just now, aren't they?" So Petal had said, delicately perceptive, on Loveday's first evening at the flat. Her big brown pansy eyes were soft with sympathy. Her voice was like a pansy, too, deep and brown and tender . . . and the dark sheen of her reddish-brown hair. Her little velvety silences were like dropped leaves. "Don't tell me about it if you'd rather not. You can trust me. No—you are quite right. *Don't* trust me; don't trust anyone. It's wisest to nibble round the safe outside edge of life. In the middle we find the jungle and the wild beasts. . . . If we're too venturesome . . . one gets . . . hurt. I think in some ways we're so alike, Loveday. We both expect too much of life. . . . It's only after you've pulled your cracker and thrown away your cheap toy inside that you find the philosopher's motto on its strip of paper. And then it's usually a bitter consolation for the ruined gold and scarlet cracker. . . ."

Oh, she could do it for hours. . . . Pools and Personalities, Loveday called it impatiently. Deep, deep pools of silent understanding, and two sitting at the brink, exchanging broken

phrases: "Things are very difficult for you just now, aren't they? . . ." *"That's* a safe lay!" reflected the critic in Loveday, which lately refused to leave her lazily amiable. "You can say that to anybody and at any time, and bring up a fish."

Petal went on: "I'm incurably reckless. I ought to have learned to be middle-aged by now, oughtn't I, Loveday? Middle-aged and careful; but I just *can't* wait about. When people suffer, I have to do something quickly. I'm always being told —yes, even Charles scolds me—that I oughtn't to give way rashly to impulse; that I ought to be prudent and make inquiries, because everybody isn't to be trusted. Don't you hate that pedantic, cautious little phrase: 'make inquiries?' I associate it with a fat little man in a check suit, with mean lines in his face. Meanness! You know, Loveday, you're like I am—" ("I'm *not!*" whispered Loveday, in passionate but voiceless protest)—"we'd both rather trust everybody on sight and make a hundred mistakes than trust no one and make one mistake. I'd never be able to sleep again, thinking of that one mistake."

Loveday's comment was silent and monosyllabic.

Meanness? Petal could not bear meanness? "But *she's* not generous. She knows I'm broke, dead broke. All those stories about my past in London that Charles made me tell last night —amusing, but they just proved I was broke. Petal was so broad-minded; not shocked at any of them. How we all laughed! What a merry party! And here I am, stuck. It's vile; I can't buy a packet of cigarettes; but she always remembers to put a good supply of my special Gold Flakes in my room, though I only said once that I couldn't bear Egyptians. Petal's so wonderful about the little things! She never forgets. . . . God! If I had a girl staying with me who was broke, I'd find some way of filling her pockets. Petal ought to know what it's like, to be broke. I can't tip the servants; I can't give a penny to a beggar; I can't take a 'bus home if I go out by myself; I can't go out by myself. I'm stuck, stuck, stuck. And I believe she knows that, too. It's an amusement she can afford to have without putting herself wrong with Charles. Oh . . . perhaps

she's only dense—dense, and rather fond of money. Charles says she's the most generous soul he knows. . . ."

"Why—yes, of course. *Of course.* Why didn't I see it before? He exaggerates his own carefulness so as to show her up in greater relief; he pretends he won't spend; he pretends he's mean; and then Petal stands treat, and Charles says: 'There, you see?' . . . Oh, God, let me stop understanding him, or else understand it all, and not just some of it."

"Or get away."

"Best to get right away."

"Lord, how easy it was to grab hold of a fiver, in the old days! I can't scrummage round, from here; it isn't good manners. Charles would hate it, while I was his guest—or, rather, Petal's guest; and he'd be right to hate it. How can I get hold of money? Oh, I wish Mummy were somewhere in London, near me—and that I could go to her, out of this hell."

"Get away. . . ."

"Charles would never forgive me. That doesn't matter. He'll never forgive me anyhow, for not backing him up about Petal. He hates people who make it harder instead of easier. . . . If I'd laid another wodge of adoration in front of his precious shrine . . . I'd like to have it out with him, about Petal! Never forgive me . . . I keep on saying that! 'Forgive' is only a word. It's a glazed word that dangles about loose. There's no such thing as 'forgive' with a click. Unless it is that you're always so bucked with yourself for forgiving, that you're too sleek to bear rancour, ever afterwards."

"What a pity to leave the flat, when I'm being given such a *lovely* time: beautiful satisfying meals, wine, the best people, and parties, and a bedroom that's almost too good for Loveday, considering what Loveday's used to! Of course, she does keep it in rather a mess. . . . Damn! Damn! What's he doing it for? If he'd only tell me *why!* If I dared ask him! Servants to wait on me; invisible hands . . . service flats . . . it's too silent. . . . Give me Mummy scolding away in the hall because Cesarina won't wear a cap. . . . But Petal would never

risk running a home of her own, and a car of her own; they'd be too real, and they might go wrong. And that horrible hired-by-the-year car, that isn't even her own, glides up every day, glides away again, and is always in perfect running repair, and doesn't give any trouble, and nobody ever takes its guts out, or if they do, Petal doesn't know."

"Nothing is real here. The flat isn't real, and the servants, and the car, and this devoted mother and son who aren't devoted, and wonderful Petal who isn't wonderful, and friends who've gone dumb except in praise of Petal, and Loveday, who's being kept in such luxury, and has never, never, never been so poor before. . . . I know too much about everything here; and I can't stop anything. I'm frightened of Charles, and I love him, and he might love me if I admired Petal, although he doesn't admire Petal himself. . . . He doesn't, I know he doesn't; I'm sure he doesn't. It's the only thing I *am* sure about, in this suffocating inferno!"

LOVEDAY was telling Charles about a party at the Gargoyle, to which she and Petal had been invited, the evening before. She was excited, showing glints and gleams of her old spontaneous gaiety—the double beat, the joyous tattoo at the heart of things, which Charles had so missed ever since he had brought her to stay with his mother, a little more than a fortnight ago.

". . . He was such a funny nervous, moustached one—actually a moustache, Charles. That might have been because he had a frog's mouth. Have you ever tried to draw a frog with a moustache, because that would show you at once? But the most marvellous dancer, and our heights just met, like yours and mine. That's why he was so thrilled with me, and made me that offer."

"What offer?"

"Why, to go abroad with him, and be his dancing partner. I *told* you, Charles. Or didn't I? Oh, no, I began at the other end. He's a master-dancer!"

"Oh, a dancing-master."

"A *Master*-dancer. Like a Master-builder. He's a frightfully famous one. With branches of his school in Budapest and Stockholm and Dresden and Prague and Warsaw. . . . What a good time I'd have! And he says I wouldn't have to teach; only go with him in the evenings to the smartest hotels and be seen dancing with him. Just that. And he'd take me all over Europe in his car, and give me an expensive trousseau, and a salary."

"Loveday," said Charles, becoming dreadfully English, "*who* is this Circus-Master that you're prattling about?"

"Fritz von Tadelheim himself!" brought out Loveday, triumphantly. For the moment she had forgotten all her dark perplexities.

"Fritz von Tadelheim himself?" repeated Charles. "What do you mean by 'himself'?"

"I'm not going to put up with your learned-counsel manner!" cried Loveday. "I've told you. He's the most well-known professional dancer on the Continent, and he wants me to be his partner for exhibition. I'm so flattered!"

"I don't doubt the exhibition part of it. Loveday—*darling*—you're not seriously considering making a mountebank of yourself in half the cities of Europe?"

Loveday had not been considering it seriously, up till now. Von Tadelheim had called her dancing *fabelhaft* and *tadellos* and *kolossal*, and it was a refreshing change to hear hyperbole heaped up on her behalf, instead of on Petal's. Also, his proposals had enlivened her nearly dying sense of bravado, of fantastic adventure.

And he had shown her an archway of escape.

She did not mean to plunge through; but just being shown that escape existed had done her good. But now Charles, Charles who was responsible for all her present misery, Charles had the insolence thus coldly to criticize von Tadelheim's disinterested kindness. What kindness had she had from Charles?

"I dare say," said Loveday, with superb detachment from Charles' possible opinions, "I dare say, you know, I shall accept; only I shall have to decide in a hurry, because, naturally,

I want to travel as his partner, all luxurious; and he starts tomorrow."

"Are you serious, Loveday?"

"Stiff with seriousness. Why not?"

"Does Petal know anything about this—this luminous notion?" He did not wait for her answer, but went on to say: "There are moments, you preposterous infant, when you seem to me only half civilized."

"I suppose it's a reaction," said Loveday, icily, "from my supercivilized existence here in this flat." But still she was trying to restrain herself, for she felt that this would not be an ordinary quarrel if she once let go of her overstrained reticence—not like so many of the quarrels she had had with Charles which ended in a thunder and lightning of rage—and then laughter. There would be no laughter at the end of this quarrel. Too much had been left unspoken lately—too much concerning Petal. Wherever they began, at whatever spoke of the outer wheel, they would find Petal at the hub of this quarrel. . . . "And after that," thought Loveday piteously, "perhaps I may never see him again."

So she made a tremendous effort and reversed again on to her former tone: "I wish you could have heard me being a business one. I said that of course I should need to have a proper contract, and that my dear old mother would certainly have to travel everywhere along with us, in case he should turn quee. . . . Von Tadelheim promised the contract, but jibbed a bit at the old mother. He told me that far from being quee, he was so to be trusted that he would treat me as though I vos a Serene Princess. 'An ugly Serene Princess,' I stipulated, all haggling. And he answered: 'I haf not that much imagination!' Nice of him, wasn't it?"

"He sounds the most utter bounder."

"Darling Charles. I was waiting for you to say that."

"Anyone would say it. That's the worst of these night-club parties. Look at what you pick up there."

"You picked me up at one of them," Loveday reminded him.

He laughed: "I'll forgive you for that if you promise me you will never see this foreign ring-master again."

Loveday felt impelled to a final weakness: "It's a bit awkward. I'd promised him that I would meet him tomorrow morning at Victoria with my poor little bits of luggage. He promised to get me seven frocks in Paris on our way to Budapest. If I don't go with him, will you buy me seven frocks here in London, Charles? And will you leave a message tomorrow morning at Victoria, on your way to the Bar, or wherever you go?"

"You made a definite appointment with this—this conjuror?"

Loveday nodded. "I didn't suppose that I'd keep it, when it came down to brass tacks."

"Then—why in God's name did you make it?"

"That's the sort of nonchalant one I am!"

"Did anybody at the party hear you fixing up to go abroad with this acrobat?"

"Everybody. I dare say they guessed I wouldn't. I dare say he guessed it, too."

"Loveday, I wish you could see how you are letting down Petal by doing that sort of thing. You probably led him to think that you are unhappy with us."

"I am," said Loveday, her eyes sombre.

It was out, now. And Charles was looking like the Prince of Darkness. . . .

In terror, she tried desperately to be flippant again: "Charles, I can almost see your breath coming out in smoke, and a whirl of sparks round your head."

"I'm afraid your standards are a bit too high for us. What can you possibly want that you haven't had here?"

Loveday did not answer. There was too much . . . and her brain was not working.

"What can you want that we haven't given you?" Charles repeated, sternly. He did not want Loveday to see how hurt and disappointed he was, so he bullied her.

She stammered, aware that she must articulate something,

and groping for the most tangible of her thousand whirling griefs: "Money!"

. . . And saw at once that the fatal word had carried nothing to him of all her oppressive, defenceless fortnight. Once again he was saying to himself: "She's only out for what she can get. We've given her hospitality, but that wasn't solid enough; she couldn't carry it away with her. . . ."

But they had not got to Petal, yet. There was still a faint hope of escape, before she should be forced at last and at last to tell him her feelings for Petal.

"What could you want money for? I could understand it when you were on your own, but I thought—" he repeated the male cry down the ages— "I thought we were giving you whatever you wanted. So what could you want money for, here?"

She tried and tried to invent some imposing thing for which she could legitimately have wanted money. Her brain refused to respond. She had wanted it for freedom. She could not say that.

"You can't expect me to sit down, now, and make a list!" she cried, in frantic rebellion.

"You can't expect me to believe you wanted money, unless you tell me what you wanted to spend it on."

"Oh, little things." . . . She could only think of powder-puff and lipstick, and cigarettes, and hair-waving, so she offered him these—a pitifully frivolous little bundle.

"As it happens," Charles remarked, "I remember Petal suggesting that she should send her special *coiffeur* into your room, if you required him. I remember, too, that you mentioned once, and only once, that you could not smoke Egyptians, and Petal saw to it that you always had a supply of Gold Flake."

But this—this couldn't be Charles. Not the Charles she had known, away from Petal? The one royal companion who, on appeal, had never failed her? Whose quick-witted spirit had not only satisfied Loveday's exactions, but had travelled beyond them. This—Charles? Cold and dense and cruel? He was behaving like a man under heavy enchantment; and she could

not pierce the spell. Surely—oh surely he could not *believe* that her trouble began and ended in a packet of Gold Flake? *Charles?* . . .

"It's impossible to be literal," she pleaded.

"Be honest, then."

Loveday began to laugh—Charles had told her to be honest, and she could still appreciate a good joke. . . . In his next sentence he would probably tell her to take example from Petal. Yes, here it was—well, almost:

"Why don't you say that you've been unhappy here because you're jealous of Petal? You're amazingly conventional at heart, Loveday. It seems unnatural to you that it shouldn't be the other way round—that *she* shouldn't be jealous of *you*, like any other interfering old hag of a mother."

"He means Mummy!" reflected a wildly angry Loveday—quite without justice. "He's never met her, but to him she's an interfering old hag, because she's not wonderful, like Petal!" And now, on Mummy's behalf—she had kept silent on her own—but now she was going to let him have it. She was going to say—something like this; arrowheads, carved from her flint, and sharpened to wound him:

"You're wrong, Charles. I'm not in the least jealous of Petal. But you've dinned her into me ever since I came to this horrible flat. You've tried to drag me to your altar by the scruff of my neck. Well, I got her in one. This is her secret: she dies unless she can put herself in the right. Everything winds itself round that. That's her lay. She's welcome to it. But look here, Charles, I'm not under any jealous conventional delusion about the blind devotion of a son for his mother, where you and Petal are concerned. Hell!—If it were as simple as that!"

"But you *know* about her, as much as I do. You've known for years. You won't know; but you do!"

. . . But Loveday was still facing him in silence, her eyes dilated, her hands tightly clenched at her breast, after she had said all these things. For she had said only the last of them, aloud. How *could* she, after all? His mother—Petal was his mother. You've got to be decent! Where her own mother was

in question, she would allow not a word. She had been ready to slay Charles just now, on Mummy's behalf. Even though —penitently—he might not have meant his attack for Mummy. And, for the rest, she was "enjoying" Petal's hospitality; under Petal's roof; eating Petal's salt. "*My* mother says . . . *I* never *should* . . ." the jingle rattled through her head yet again. You simply can't be rude to people when you're a guest under their roof. Now when they're guests under yours. . . . "That doesn't leave much chance to be rude in between!" . . . Nevertheless, Loveday controlled the surge. Only her final accusation squeezed a way through. For no misery had been as black as the perpetual sight of Charles, whom she loved, possessed and perverted through and through by a lie.

She could not find her way about, while Charles lied. But perhaps now—might he not understand her desperate appeal, at last? Might he not give her some cause for his monstrous sham? Need they stay cooped up together, he and she, with this macabre misunderstanding dividing them?

. . . "But you know about her. As much as I do. You've known for years. You *won't* know—but you do!"

She spoke it—hanging on no thread that he could see. But an irrelevant challenge, cut loose from the speech that she had denied herself.

Like a man who had been placed against a wall to be shot and was determined to show no trace of what he felt, Charles stood—and received her solitary bullet. He might not have heard her. It might have been her fancy—that saw a flicker across the light blaze of his eyes.

After a scarcely perceptible silence he spoke: "Look here, Loveday. It must have been damnable for you stuck down here without a penny of your own, all this time. It was an accident, in a way. And in a way I was to blame. Anyhow, I was a brute, just now, not to understand."

—His own voice again, with its old quality of impetuous semi-ironic affection—the irony for himself, the affection for her. Not the Petal voice, but his own. And by so many minutes too late.

". . . I was a brute. Look here—take a hundred pounds, now, won't you? Just to carry on? Here—"

Loveday put her hands behind her back.

The gesture was eloquent enough. If he would not grant her friendship, even a bare answer to that one desperate effort of hers—then they were not friends, and it was no good pretending any more.

So Loveday put her hands behind her back.

Charles had not understood much, recently. But he understood that. Crumpling up the notes and the cheque-book, he thrust them back into his pocket. Then he courteously said good-night to her, and went.

—"ANOTHER dead man!" sobbed Loveday . . . her usual chant when she sent an empty bottle swinging and crashing behind her, as she sped on in the void.

THE next morning she met Fritz von Tadelheim at Victoria.

She told Petal that she had suddenly been called to Italy by her mother. And she added: "Thank you very much for having me," and "You've been so kind to me." . . . Things like that. ("You *have* to! . . .")

It was Petal's car that took her to Victoria. Loveday's sense of sardonic mischief, cultivated by Charles, could take that point with a rueful laugh. For Charles would have said: "What can you possibly want with money? Petal supplies—everything, doesn't she? Her car . . ."

CHAPTER VIII

"DEBONAIR"

"IF in the meantime you've been thousands of miles," Loveday argued confidently to herself, "it makes twelve days seem ever so long ago; much longer ago than if you'd stopped in the same place all the time." So it did not seem to her in the least outrageous that she should be driving straight to Charles' rooms, on her arrival in London, after her headlong homeward flight from Budapest and Fritz von Tadelheim.

Certainly, she and Charles had parted on the crest of a quarrel. That need not count, now. She could rely on Charles. In an odd sort of way Loveday knew that though Charles would not have forgotten, any more than she had forgotten, he would know *when* to forget, and this very evening was a "when to forget" evening. For she had so much to tell him—so much that was rich and juicy, and that he alone could appreciate to the extent she desired.

Loveday felt little ripples of anticipation running up and down her spine as she thought of that special look, amused, absorbed, quizzical, with which Charles always listened to her racy helter-skelter. It was a look which said: "You're really the only other person in the world; and *such* a darling!"

—Of course she was going straight to Charles.

Besides, where else could she go in her present scrape? At seven o'clock in the evening, with all her luggage, and nobody expecting her; and broke as usual, broke to the wide; utterly exhausted; still more utterly proved wrong—for of course von Tadelheim had turned out to be a rotter. But Charles would not remind her of that—not Charles; he was a beast, but a different sort of beast; not a "reminding" beast. . . .

"God! I hope he'll be at home. I can't pay the taxi if he isn't. It'll have to wait!"

What a lovely dinner they were going to have, he and she! Back in England again. . . . Lots to tell, and the right and only Charles to tell it to. She hugged her left knee, and in a spasm of affection kissed it. "Wonder where I shall sleep to-night. Charles will manage. He'll get me a room and bath at a nice expensive hotel. I can pay him back when I'm twenty-one," thought Loveday, as the taxi turned into the archway that led from the roar of Fleet Street into the sudden cloistral tranquillity of the Middle Temple.

Charles was not in; but his man told Loveday that Mr. Elvaston might be expected at any moment, for he purposed dining out— "Not he!" from Loveday, under her breath. "Not when he sees I'm here!"— "And so he will be coming home to dress," finished Morgan.

The last remaining trace of Loveday's consciousness of the terms on which she and Charles had parted, twelve days ago, showed in her reluctance to ask Morgan to remove her trunk from the taxi, and settle up her fare. It occurred to her that Charles might not like it, with his fastidious attitude about money. So many people went all quee about money—as though it were secret and sacred. Charles was not like that—not about money itself—but about being asked for it. "Especially when it's me!" So Loveday thanked Morgan, and went downstairs again, and waited in the taxi outside. Charles would be in presently. It was quite comfortable in the taxi, with the rain sluicing down outside.

Running away—she was always running away—running away and coming back again. But this last scrape, breathless and perilous though it had been, was not dark to look back upon. On the contrary, it had staged itself in the traditional spirit of threats and treachery that a girl might expect, when, without trepidation and without guard, she rushes, laughing, into the world of wicked men against whom her elders had so often warned her. Threats and treachery and melodrama, where men wore waxed moustaches, and muttered oaths, shaking the handles of locked bedroom doors. . . . Loveday, in the dim recesses of her taxi, chuckled and wished Charles would hurry

up. It was romantic, waiting here for him, quietly, in the rain; he still unaware that she waited. But you could not be altogether indifferent to a ticking taximeter, even at Charles' expense. Especially—yet again—as Charles didn't know. . . . Poor innocent Charles. . . . Nine and eightpence now. . . . "The very tick of vengeance," thought Loveday!—"He asked me what I could possibly want with ready cash!" Her stockings felt wet and clammy; it had poured so hard, trooping off the Channel steamer. Charles should take them off and rub her feet, she reflected, sleepily. . . .

Then suddenly, with a leap of her heart, she sat upright, rubbed the window, and peered through. Was that his Bentley? His black Bentley? Yes. It pulled up just behind her taxi. "*Darling* Bentley!" whispered Loveday, feeling as wildly affectionate towards all Charles' possessions, including Morgan, as she had felt towards her own knee. She pulled down the window of her taxi and called to him as he turned to run up the steps of the house.

"Oi! Charles!"

Charles swung round. "You devil!" he said—and laughed.

She saw his face, radiant, transfigured.

Of course, she had been right to come to him!

"Darling-angel Charles. I've been waiting for you for hours. I've run away from Budapest, escaped from von Tadelheim; and Morgan said you were coming in. I haven't paid my taxi, because I'd nothing to pay it with. You've got to get me a room somewhere for tonight. That'll be after you've fed me, because I'm ever so hungry. And I've mountains to tell you, so let's go on, quick. On my next birthday I'll give you an I O U for what you pay the taxi. Charles, it's utterly heavenly to see you again, and you were *so* right about von Tadelheim. That's the worst of me—I didn't know what men were like," finished Loveday, wide-eyed, her lips softly parted. Then she broke down into laughter again.

They were inside the house by now, going up the stone steps towards Charles' rooms on the second floor. Charles took her by the shoulders and shook her. . . . She was so obviously

only mocking at rue and remorse! Then, his arm still flung about her shoulders, they raced together up the remaining flight.

Lord, but it was good to have Loveday back! Who but Loveday had that gift of behaving, whenever she met you, as though she had just met you for the first time, with all your potentialities as yet merely guessed at?

Morgan was sent down to deal with the taxi and the trunk. Morgan was commanded to produce an adequate meal for two, and to cancel Charles' dinner engagement—in fact, it was he who had to remind Charles of its very existence.

Loveday curled herself up luxuriously in the big male armchair in front of the satisfying man-made fire, and drank a stiff whisky and soda. She also allowed Charles to bare her cold feet, and chafe them, while they curled and wriggled in ecstasy as near the blaze as she could bear them.

"I'm denying myself nothing!" she remarked, voluptuously at home; and, for the hour, not even in love. She was loving Charles so much in a comfortable sort of way that she could not be bothered with any other wish but that she were a man instead of a girl, so that she might for ever stop where she was, and be pals with Charles, without anguish and sombre complications. She was wishing this . . . as he had wished, on their very first meeting, that they could have been boys going back to school together.

Charles never discovered the logical and coherent sequence of Loveday's adventure in Central Europe with wicked von Tadelheim; he was content to listen, relishing the inimitable tang of her style. At random she pulled out here and there, for his benefit, tags of bizarre incident, a vivid patter of dialogue. . . . And never noticed, little Philistine, that, matching wit with its equal in wine, he had opened in her honour a bottle of his 1874 White Hermitage, of which very little remained in the cellar.

". . . So when I saw Fritzie was going to be quee, and he *was* quee, and likely to be quee'er, I knew I must beat it for home, before he rose in a swarm and settled. And I hadn't got

my fare, of course. Budapest seemed a million miles from anywhere. Such an Eastern City. Oh—and I brought home a souvenir for you, Charles. A nice woman always thinks of her friends, when she's on a holiday. *Not* a cow-bell—I didn't get anywhere among cows. But an empty bottle of ammoniated quinine with the label in Hungarian. You'll cherish that, won't you? Because it *is* rare, in a way—"

"I'll sweep everything else off the chimney-piece to make room for it," Charles promised, enthusiastically. "This is the first present I've ever had from you, Loveday!"

"I didn't actually *pay* for it," Loveday confessed, frankly. "I found it in the room I was taken to wash in, when we went out early one morning in von Tadelheim's car to some famous hotel for breakfast, miles away over the plains. The Tzigany leader had been imported to London for the Hungarian wedding scene in that revue three years ago—what was it?—one of Charlot's. So I asked him to translate the label for me. And he played on his fiddle, afterwards, nearer and nearer to me, music that made morning and coffee and rolls seem as wild and strange as night. I enjoyed that. And we had a creamy cheese, with butter and caraway-seed and scarlet paprika and chopped onions and gherkins and mustard arranged in neat dabs and piles round the edge of the plate. You mash it all together with the cheese, and make a mud pie. I ate lots. And all the time I was wondering and wondering how to get my fare back to England."

"How did you?"

"Borrowed it from a tart," remarked casually a Loveday who was bursting with pride at her own sophistication in the murky by-ways of Europe. "I gave her an I O U, of course!"

Charles threw back his head and shouted with laughter. Loveday thought he would never stop. . . .

"Well—I *did*. She was such a darling little childish one. I called her Pinkie. We had a lovely talk about life, in the passage of the hotel at five in the morning. Thus we may see, Charles, that a silk stocking need not be strictly virtuous to produce a roll of bank-notes for a sister in distress!"

"And what other lessons," said Charles, solemnly, "have you learnt from this experience?"

Loveday said, with due meekness: "Please, that gentlemen sometimes have dishonourable intentions towards pretty and innocent girls."

"Gentlemen? Never!"

Loveday looked at him . . . and Charles grinned back. There was that flash of unholy confession in his eyes which delighted her whenever it happened, which was seldom.

"No, never *gentlemen,*" she corrected herself, hastily. "Never English gentlemen."

"Foreigners," suggested Charles.

"Yes, foreigners," assented Loveday. "Being English does make such a big difference, doesn't it? You, for instance, Charles, whatever the temptation, I am sure—"

"Whatever the temptation," acquiesced Charles.

He looked at her where she lay, dropped down as naturally in his huge leather arm-chair as though she would lie there, tired out, for weeks. So slim and lithe and golden; such a pretty child; such an undaunted gambler! "*Whatever* the temptation," he repeated again . . . and reverted to his safer mock-portentous attitude: "Well, you've gained your experience. I'd let it rest at that, if I were you."

"Oh!" cried Loveday, suddenly animated. "I've gained something more. I *must* show you, Charles. You'll simply love me in it!" She dashed out of the room, and left him wondering. He heard her calling Morgan to help her undo the straps of her trunk. A clatter of objects tossed out on the parquet floor of the hall. . . . A breathless pause. . . . Then Loveday came peacocking back into the room, wearing a silver tissue wrap with a collar of some silvery fur that rose high behind the small delicate shape of her head. Superbly she shimmered up and down the room.

"Don't I look too marvellous in it? Look at the way it swings out and shows flashes and stripes of the silver and scarlet lining. I couldn't wear it, of course, if I weren't so tall! Can you imagine me flaunting into the Duna Palota with this on?

Charles, you *will* take me to the Florida, won't you, wearing this coat? I love causing sensations: 'Everybody present was asking who was the fair Incognita in the silver coat, which was never removed once during the whole evening. Many guesses were hazarded—' " Loveday continued, on her parade round the room—" 'many guesses were hazarded, as she glided between the crowded tables, as to who she could possibly be; probably the famous Russian courtesan who had been so admired by the late Austrian emperor that he had passed on to her the cloak which his late Empress had been given by the late Czar of all the Russias—' "

A frown appeared between Charles' brows as he watched her. "If you ask me, I think it's a pretty awful garment," he wanted to remark. But, relenting at the prospect of her disappointment, he only said: "It might look all right on a gala night at the Opera at Monte Carlo, perhaps. Where did you get it from, Loveday?"

"Von Tadelheim, of course. From our Fritzie. While he was still hoping, and just before he found out that he wasn't going to get what he thought he was going to get from me. Poor Fritz!" Loveday was brimming with sunny compassion.

"He bought this cloak for you? *You let him?* And you didn't leave it behind when you came away?"

"Why should I? Leave it behind? My beautiful silver coat?"

"Good God!"

Loveday stared at the sharp change in his voice; at the angry condemnation of his "Good God!" Why then—she had made another mistake. He had been so wonderful during the last two hours, relishing the most daring of her escapades. What had gone amiss, now, with his mood? The gay spirit of the evening shivered and collapsed like a dream and Loveday stood staring at wakefulness—staring at Charles, incredulous.

"Why not?" she repeated. "My lovely silver coat? I've been so looking forward to wearing it. He gave it to me of his own free will. I didn't ask for it. He was gambling on a chance—and he lost. That's his affair. It isn't as though we cared for each other—either of us. I can't thrash to and fro with delicate

protestations and all sorts of doddle when— Why, Charles, it's just loot! That's how I look on it!"

"Evidently!" said Charles. "And that's really all you think about, isn't it? Loot!"

"You needn't be rude," icily, from a tall princess in silver. "After all, I *am* your guest."

And then she remembered, for the first time since their reunion, on what harsh terms they had parted twelve days ago: "What can you want that we haven't given you?" And her dazed, helpless answer, for want of a better: "Money!" But now she thought to have guessed, and proof against proof had verified her guess, that in big essentials it was his nature to spend and give most recklessly, without counting. Not a tenner, but a hundred pounds had he offered her, as though it were nothing, last time they had been together. Not a fiver, but fifty, half of his whole year's allowance, he had presented, sardonically, to the sycophantic school-friend he had loved long ago. And Mercedes had commented on his generosity to Melville Farquhar, his discarded mistress. That car, too, which at sixteen he had flauntingly sacrificed to a bitter Carnival . . .

No, Charles was not mean.

Wiser now than at first, Loveday understood. He did not mind giving. He minded that she should ask him to give. Him —or anyone else. Von Tadelheim . . .

Fool! Again she had jangled across that exposed nerve of his. Bang across his Timon complex. Yet it had seemed that nothing more could ever go wrong, now that she and Charles were so perfectly reunited. The word "guest" reminded her. . . . Was she always to be somebody's guest, Loveday wondered, forlornly? Always somebody's guest, so that she could never say what was in her mind?

"I think I'll go home now," she said to Charles, in a cold tone that hid her chagrin and heart-break. Then she recalled that there was no such place, at the moment. "You promised that you'd ring up some hotel and fix up a room for me." She could have reminded him of this in an entirely happy and natural voice, ten minutes ago; she could even have added a

mischievous burlesque of what the world would say should she yield to her sleepiness and remain cosily where she was, in the rooms of an honourable Englishman. Yet now it was an almost unendurable strain to ask him to do anything so friendly for her—so kind and ordinary and friendly as to get her a room because she was temporarily homeless.

Her apprehension was prophecy. The thought which she dreaded had slipped into Charles' mind, and from the wrong angle. Not "How I could love her, tonight!" but instead: "If she's that sort of girl, well, why shouldn't I?". . . And all because of the silver coat which she should have left behind in Budapest. Loot! . . . If she were that sort of girl, why bother to fix up a room for her at the hotel? After all, he had met her on the wrong side of things: "provided" for Swindon's party, that night at the Café de Londres. And willing to be provided. . . . "There might be pickings," her friend the manager had probably urged. Sack a city for a silver coat—Yes, that was his Debonair! So why be squeamish any more? Had he not tried to protect her? Installed her at Petal's flat by invitation of Petal, his mother? And had she not hated it, and run away from them—run away from them to von Tadelheim, where there might be more tangible results?

A silver coat, for instance.

Charles' whole outlook was black and distorted. His hand shook with rage as he reached for a cigarette and lit it. If the girl wanted presents, he would give her presents—silver coats, golden coats, ermine coats, whatever she fancied! "It's a good thing you're rich!" she had said, on their first meeting. Christ! Why bother to fix up a room for her at a hotel? Rather amusing to be a wicked foreigner, for a change! He had a notion that Loveday would not be quite so eager to escape from him as from von Tadelheim. . . .

Also, he had a notion, but this lay so much deeper that it did not affect his conduct for the moment, that he was thinking very much like a cad.

. . . Loveday braced herself, at his look. She had always expected that she might have to go through this, sooner or

later, with Charles. He would know better, presently, than to imagine that she was going to give him what she had given no other man. No other man, because she was too cold to care about it. She cared too much about it with Charles. Cared too much about—him. She wanted to marry him, yes, but she was not using virtue as a bait, now; she was not playing any game, consciously or unconsciously; she was just in revolt . . . and loving him. Loveday felt that she would rather never see him again than let him possess her as carelessly and viciously as this. "He's damn well got to be shown, that's all!" flickered through her mind.

Aloud, she checked him with the mocking question: "Grand seduction scene?" She meant to go on: "Don't be a fool, Charles!" finally annihilating his illusion. But before she spoke it—and it was hard to speak, her throat felt so constricted—before she spoke it, was heard a ring at the front door, and a knock, and more knocking, and the distant muffled clamour of voices outside. Morgan was always prompt. Even as Charles broke out: "What the Hell—" he had already admitted the visitors. Loveday shrugged her shoulders. She was too sophisticated to be really disturbed by such an outward trifle as being found in Charles' rooms by some of Charles' friends at such a comparatively early hour of the night—barely half past ten. She hoped, however, that they would quickly assume the worst and go away again. Then, in a very short time, she could gently correct her English gentleman's ideas of what she was and was not prepared to do for him. . . . And he could see about a room at the hotel; the Barchester was close by.

She heard a male voice saying in the hall: "My hat! What's all this?" and a chorus of laughter.—Oh, of course, she had left her things lying about when she had tossed them out of her trunk in search of the coat. No wonder the visitors were astonished. Charles himself was such a punctilious and orderly person; and so was Morgan.

The door was flung open. Voices, figures, poured into the room—four or five of them.

"Forgetful devil you are, Charles! Ten o'clock at the Florida. What about it? You promised to sign us in."

Two men . . . three men . . . One of them Loveday knew slightly . . . then a girl, dark, rather pretty . . .

Lastly, another woman.

"*Petal!* my dear!" exclaimed Charles. "Do forgive me. I put off the Wallises, and then I forgot my appointment with you, later."

The "Petal voice" again.

Loveday shuddered.

And Petal was being marvellous—"truly too wonderful," as any of her friends would have chorused had they known the subtle complications of the situation with which Petal now had to deal. Not a trace of rancour did Petal show for the way Loveday had left her so abruptly, to join her mother in Italy. . . . Yet here, suddenly, twelve days later, was the same pretty child in Charles' rooms, her trunk in the hall, and half her intimate possessions scattered on the floor around it.

Loveday stood helpless . . . while Petal protected her. Petal's beautiful tolerance, her swift pitiful understanding of the scrapes and tumbles of youth, made this protection entirely possible and adequate. She caused it to appear as though she had expected Loveday back at her own flat after a brief visit elsewhere, to mutual friends in Sussex; that she had arranged a rendezvous with the girl here, as Charles had been to Sussex to fetch her in his Bentley. But—had she or Loveday muddled the dates? She was quite *sure* it was tomorrow—"Not that it matters in the least, darling, for you'd have found your room ready, even if you'd come to an empty flat, and your careless hostess dancing at the Florida. There are several letters waiting for you, too. But I'm not sure that I *am* the culprit, even now. This is the thirteenth, isn't it? Child, you *said* the fourteenth in your letter—St. Valentine's Day, you know. No, of course, you wouldn't know. That belongs to my mother's generation. Never mind, we'll quarrel about dates presently. Meanwhile, what do you want to do—

go straight home to the flat and dress and come on to dance, while we wait for you? Or are you too tired, and would you rather go to bed? We must go home first, anyhow, because of your luggage. Darling, what a most attractive coat! Did Mrs. Barry give it to you? She's been to Paris lately, I know. Did you snatch it out and put it on to show Charles? I'd have done the same myself. But I doubt if he'll like it; it isn't quite his style!"—And that was Petal's only accurate guess at the psychology of the evening.

Loveday was helpless. The old spell had fallen again. Once more she was groping in the shadows, or dazed by the brilliant lights that were not her own daylight. She could have managed this, had she been left alone. She knew that Petal was exhibiting to Charles. Any qualm that he might have had, even in front of his altar, was stilled and reassured. She saw Charles worshipping Petal, and knew that his triumph would presently recoil upon herself: Generous Petal! Ungrateful Loveday! Petal, an unworldly woman of the world who could make harmonious any moment of blank discomfort. See how she deals with the situation: calling by accident at her son's rooms, with a crowd of friends—a young girl among them—and men always ready to throw a doubt and a sneer—and finding there Loveday in her silver coat, her things half unpacked. Pretty, silly Loveday, half wild, and half innocent. . . . These modern children who were too wanton to be protected—too ignorant to protect themselves. . . .

It was always easy for Loveday to follow in detail what Petal was doing, and why. But she was helpless. She had to submit herself to protection. And now Charles would never know that she had meant at all costs to leave him that night. Now Charles would have to be allowed to believe always that Petal had saved Loveday by an opportune entrance and divine behaviour.

Petal was clever. Petal made no mistakes. Petal had vanquished her, completely.

On the wrong side again. A girl found in a man's rooms.

What did it matter? . . . Yet if Loveday had been left to look after Loveday . . .

Good-night was said to Charles; Loveday's trunk was quickly re-packed; Charles and the other three men were going off to the Florida.

"Charles, you don't know Tom Reid, do you? No—I only just know him myself, as far as time counts. Tom, this is my son— And oh, don't please, like all the rest of them, pretend that you can hardly believe it! Mr. Reid is a *real* artist, Charles; an architect. He simply dreams houses. . . . Are you taking him with you? Splendid. And Loveday and I can drop Jean at her home, on our way. You don't mind for once, do you, darling?"

Lady Jean Ravenhill did not mind at all, she said. She was perfectly happy to go home early. One early night would do her good after a strenuous week of dancing.

"Good-night, Charles."

"Good-night, Debonair—" He did not notice that it had slipped out. "See you tomorrow."

. . . What had he called her? "Debonair?" . . . No, she could not have heard properly.

Back again to the flat. Back to hell.

There were, as Petal had said, four or five letters waiting for Loveday, readdressed from the bank. One of them from Mummy, enclosing her monthly cheque. Yes, it would be about due now. That simplified matters. Loveday felt a pale glint of relief through all her forlorn state of weariness. For she could not stop here, of course. . . .

Petal saw to it that her guest had every little gracious comfort that brings healing—she was dead nuts on healing! Then she kissed Loveday good-night, murmuring: "My dear . . . *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner!* . . ." and slipped out of the room. But she returned to say: "I shan't disturb you in the morning; you'll want to sleep late. I never wake, myself till they bring me my tea at nine, you know."

But at eight o'clock, Loveday was up and dressed and ready

to pack again. She packed in a frenzy, fearing interruption. Thank goodness, most of the things hadn't been taken out of the trunk. Ram in the silver coat . . . ram in dressing-gown, hairbrushes, shoes. This was real flight . . . grim necessity . . . panic behind her. This was no gay resourceful drama, like her recent flight across Central Europe. Loveday tiptoed to the door. . . . Find the hall porter of Lethburnham Mansions . . . beg him to procure a taxi, and fetch her trunk, as quietly as might be . . . so that Mrs. Soper should not be wakened.

The man looked at her inquiringly.

"I'm running away," said Loveday, in frank explanation. It did not seem worth while to pretend over anything so obvious. She was sick of evasions. "But it's quite all right, you know. I'm going back to my mother. She's in Italy."

The hall porter was sympathetic. Loveday was able to slip away from the flat with hardly a sound. Her bank did not open till ten, and she could not go to Italy without money; or even pay the taxi. What hell it was, always being without money! Even what Pinkie had given her in the corridor of the Duna Palota at four a.m. of a Hungarian morning had been barely enough to take her back to England—to London, to Charles' rooms. . . . Loveday caught her breath in a sob, as she remembered the perfect happiness of her first encounter with him, last night, leaning from the window of her taxi in the chill arrowy rain. She told the astonished taxi-driver, now, for it was not yet nine o'clock, to drive her anywhere he liked, in London or out of it, so that she was at the post office three doors away from her bank by a quarter to ten. She had just enough money left over for a telegram to her mother announcing her arrival. The taxi-man looked so astonished that again Loveday used the simple expedient of telling the truth. "You see, I haven't enough money to pay you until I cash a cheque, and we've got to do something for the next half-hour, haven't we?"

The taxi-man agreed. He drove her to Richmond Park and back. It was not a fine morning, and Loveday did not enjoy

the outing. She felt utterly vanquished and battered, and with the dazed sensation of having somehow been tricked, and unable to get the better of the foe who tricked her. . . . Deserted by Charles; tricked by Petal—at least, not by Petal, but by Petal's methods; the woman herself didn't count. . . . "And how funny to think that the only bit of it all that Lamb-Bird would be really horrified at, if she knew, is Budapest and poor old Fritz!" She felt vaguely sorry for Fritz. Everything was vague and rather grey, like this drizzly morning. . . . Too much time before ten o'clock; too little afterwards; for the boat train was due to depart at ten-thirty.

Loveday only just caught it. The train started as she sprang in. . . .

CHAPTER IX

"SHE'LL RUN AWAY—"

ALWAYS escaping from some hell or other. And always plunging into some fresh hell!

Never mind. Thank goodness she had just managed to catch the train at Porto Rinaldo; and there was Lagnello in the distance, on the headland of the next bay, a little white town, piled high on the edge of the sea. Here, at Lagnello, with Judith, nothing much could happen to her. She would have a good time for a little while; forget all the mess and the racketting about; enjoy herself. Rapid little pictures formed, and passed away, one after another: Mummy, bolt upright, round blue eyes popping, making a row. Petal, sweet and gracious and subtle, in that silent flat. Charles. Von Tadelheim, baffled, with the conventional bulging man-look, on one side of a locked door, she leaning breathlessly up against the panels on the other. Freya, insulting her before the whole gang in the studio. . . .

She would forget them all.

Forget Charles.

. . . In her corner seat of the carriage, going through the tunnel before Lagnello, Loveday sat, looking hard into the gloom, remembering him.

PART THREE: RETURN OF PERSEPHONE

CHAPTER I

LETHE

LOVEDAY was usually the first to reach the top terrace of the garden of Casa dei Sette, when they all trooped up the mule-track after bathing. Pat, Judith's child, said it was because Loveday had the longest legs. She flung herself flat on the grass and waited for the others. It was a brilliantly hot day, and they had had a glorious bathe, and she was hungry and perfectly happy. Why not? Already she had been here at Lagnello for five whole days; five days of Lethe. Mummy had once said: "Loveday, what do you *do* at Lagnello, that you're always wanting to be there?" and she had answered: "Oh, I don't know, Mummy. . . . We just do what we like. . . ."

Loveday's legs were bare; she wore shorts, and a loose old gym tunic of faded scarlet silk, held in round the waist by a knotted girdle of surgical bandage which she had picked up for lack of anything more appropriate. She had just been diving over and over again from the end of the breakwater into twenty feet of warm golden sea, with clear ripples down to the ribbed sand at the bottom. Her short fair hair had lost its permanent wave, and tumbled anyhow over her cheeks and forehead. She did not look at all like the sophisticated well-groomed young fop of that half year in London, or like the demure *ingénue* in white of Porto Rinaldo.

Here were the others. "Hurray! Food! Lovely food!" Three very wet spaniels shook themselves over Loveday and settled down at her side, squeezing against her with damp affection. Then came Pat, with a couple of wolf-dogs, each on a lead, because otherwise they fought the Chows at the foot of the hill. Then Stefan Chernov, Beatrice and Timothy Somer-

set, and Martin Adams, not together, but in single file, an Indian habit of theirs, after bathing. Finally Judith herself. Mab must have gone round to her room to wring out her hair. Mab Otway was the identical lady whom Loveday had met three months ago, on her way out to Porto Rinaldo; she had talked about silver foxes and the hair of Gunnar's head. She had come to stay at Lagnello, and Judith had met her at the hotel, liked her, pronounced her unsuitable for hotels, and brought her up to the House of the Seven.

"Judith!" Loveday suddenly threw off the spaniels and sat upright on the grass, supporting herself on her hands planted behind her. "Judith, what's for lunch? Will there be spaghetti? Gouts and gouts of spaghetti? Happy me!" She sank back again. "I'll have three platefuls," she murmured.

"And look at her," groaned Judith. "Slim as a sylph and elusive as a dream, and never eats less than three platefuls—often more—and potatoes after that!"

"And then a whole cream-cheese," whispered Loveday into the hot melting blue of the sky canopy, "with lots and lots of butter spread on great whacks of bread, all going crashing down among the happy potatoes. It *is* nice to be me! Is nobody making some cup?"

"Timothy is," said Judith.

"Timothy isn't," said Timothy. "Martin is."

"Martin won't," said Martin.

"Martin must," said Beatrice. "He's the youngest, except Loveday, and Loveday never does anything."

A window of the house was suddenly flung open, and Mab looked out at them all with her air of irrelevant surprise.

"Oh—h—h!" she cried, in a voice peculiarly high and plangent. "Oh—h—h! There's a lobster on the roof!"

They all glanced up, but nobody worried very much; they were used to this sort of remark from Mab; it usually had its origin somewhere, and a faint thread of reason in Mab's mind might eventually waver back to it, but they had quite given up following these threads.

"They say the owl was a baker's daughter!" replied Judith.

"Mab, darling, you grow more and more like Ophelia every day."

"Ophelia? Why? Because of the hairbrush? But she didn't, did she? I mean—wasn't that the Lady of Shalott? No, you mean the mirror. But there *is* a lobster on the roof."

"As it happens," Timothy put in, "there is. The remains of our lunch yesterday. I put it there so that Gertie could get at it, and the dogs shouldn't."

Gertie was Judith's cat.

"You're vindicated, Mab. Come down and have a drink."

For just then, Martin appeared with a glass pitcher, the sides misted, a faint tinkle inside it, and a sprig of borage floating on a surface of clear pale amber. Loveday rolled over on to her front, kicked her heels in the air, and held out her hand for the first glass.

"I'm not trying to be unselfish today," she said. "I'm just being myself. Oh, I'm dying of thirst!"

"You remind me," Stefan Chernov said, gazing at her with interest, "of some sort of an animal—no, I mean insect. It is strange, sometimes you all remind me of animals, especially the ladies."

Mab leant further out of the window, and Loveday and Judith and Beatrice all gave him their eager attention. They were quite sure they were going to hear some charming Russian compliments. It was so very seldom that Stefan was personally aware of any of them. He was a most delightful man; as simple and straightforward as any child; and he had once lived like a prince in Russia. But now he was on the far side of such adventures of blood and romance as were hardly credible. He talked about all of these, but he did not tell about them. His hearers could listen or not, as they pleased; he did not mind; the narrative went on, as though he were thinking aloud —as though life were lifted back to twenty years ago. Judith swore that she had never heard the beginning of any of Stefan's stories—perhaps they had no beginning. You suddenly became conscious that he was saying: "And so, when I left the old King in the ball-room—" You asked him what old king.

And he would put you aside with a slightly impatient: "You *know*, the King, the old King!"—as though, having been there with him, you should know all about it, although it hardly mattered if you didn't, or went away, or took up a book, or turned on the gramophone. . . . Stefan went on with his memories of war and swords and crowns. He did not brag; they were everyday matters to him. But now, actually, it did seem as though it were Loveday's long slim waving legs that he was looking at with detached interest, and not the legs of some little Slav or Montenegrin princess in the remote past.

"An insect," he mused.

Loveday suggested, helpfully: "Butterfly? Dragon-fly?"

"No, no."

"A gazelle?" put in Timothy, who was rather infatuated with Loveday.

His wife said quickly: "A gazelle's not an insect!"

"One of those filmy things that float about," Stefan went on. "They float in the sun, with long, long legs hanging down. A gnat, that's it. A gnat."

Loveday was not too pleased. "How quee! I've never thought of me as a gnat."

Chernov smiled at her, and let his gaze wander on. "Now you—" he said to Judith, who was sensitive about her bulk—"you always remind me of a nice big dog. A *big* dog," he repeated.

"Dear Stefan. I know the kind you mean: a massive sort of animal, rather larger than a St. Bernard, that rushes into the room and upsets the tea-table."

Stefan nodded, glad to be understood. "Yes, that's what I mean. A nice big dog." Having annihilated Judith and Loveday, he fixed his gallantry on to Beatrice. "And you, of course, are exactly like a rabbit—a little white rabbit—and your nose twitches, so."

"I've never been so disappointed in my life!" said Beatrice, speaking for all of them. "I really thought, didn't you, Judith, that we were in for a little subtle flattery?"

"But indeed," Stefan said, seriously—he spoke nearly per-

fect English, for, in his childhood, he had shared a Scotch governess with the Czar—or some such ermine-and-sceptre explanation—"indeed I am not flattering you. I am speaking the truth as I see it. You remind me exactly of a rabbit."

Beatrice, outraged, sprang from the low wall where she had been sitting and insisted upon taking Stefan up to the end of the garden to see some white rabbits in their hutches, so that he might contradict his comparison.

Judith called out after them: "Don't be long, Beechy. It's lunch-time!" And then Mab drifted out, her hands full of letters. Judith and Loveday and Timothy made a dive for them.

"Here's rosemary for remembrance," quoted Judith. "And here's pansies for you—that's for thoughts." She gave three letters to Timothy, who took them, saying:

"I'll give you a fiver if one of these is to say that I needn't go back to England, after all, on Saturday."

"Are you going back to England?" asked Loveday, looking at him as though she were sorry.

"Must. Business. I hate business."

"Isn't it weird," said Judith, "how Mab is always getting that half-drowned air of Ophelia and folk-songs and ballads? What with that, and Stefan's kings and princesses, I feel that the healthy robust atmosphere of the House of the Seven is rapidly decaying."

"But aren't you glad?" from Mab, in a wail of protest at healthy robust atmospheres. "I do prefer a rotting family, don't you?"

Loveday cried: "I wish you people would stop reading letters and come to lunch. There are two enormous platefuls of spaghetti on the table—one for me, and one for Stefan, because he starved for a year in a Moscow prison. My favourite kind, too. This *is* my lucky house, and my lucky day. 'Blackbird, blackbird, this is my lucky day!' . . . I know something nice is going to happen, because I met a—a rosy crustacean in the road coming up, and I bowed to him three times."

Even Timothy looked up from his letters. "A *what?* Loveday, what *did* you meet?"

"She's still thinking of the lobster on the roof," suggested Martin.

Loveday tried to explain: "He looked like one. Not a lobster; the—the other thing. He had a long, long beard, and wore a robe, and carried a staff. Sort of pilgrim—religious. The kind that do magic and know things that they won't tell."

"Rosicrucian!" laughed Judith.

Stefan and Beatrice reappeared on the lawn, the latter still unappeased.

"We stood in front of the cages," she cried; "and all your beastly rabbits, Judith, twitched their noses mockingly at me. And I said to your more than horrid Russian guest; 'There now, you can't still say that I'm like a white rabbit, can you?' And he answered, with that unruffled amiability of his: 'Now that I see them, the more I think I am right!' Timothy, wouldn't you like to fight him for me?"

"Can't, my dear. I've got to go to England, after all. I've just heard from Dawson. What's today? Wednesday? I must go on Friday at the latest."

"Oh, Tim! But I needn't, need I?"

"No, of course you needn't. We're both on the same passport; that's rather awkward. It means that you can't leave Italy till I come back. But I shan't be gone for more than a month."

"Of course, knowing that, I shall want to go to France the very day after you leave," said Beatrice. "It's a clumsy arrangement, Tim. So old-fashioned and till-death-do-us-part. I must get a separate one."

They were, by now, all sitting round the table in the loggia, immersed, almost literally immersed, in lunch. The lawn was a scrimmage of spaniels and wolf-dogs rolling over one another and fighting. In the rose-garden the gardener, Armando, wearing a nautical cap and a pair of thin evening trousers which had been presented to him by Timothy, was entertaining a friend of his, showing him round the garden, and interpolating free comments about the English and their ways.

"William nearly sacked him, last time he was home," said

Judith. "They don't get on; the Saxon and the Latin, I suppose. Armando came to me and said with dignity: 'I will go back to Monte Carlo, where I am among my own people.'"

Martin gazed at Armando with some awe. "Monte Carlo!" he murmured. "Who'd have thought it! I've never been to Monte Carlo in the season, but I didn't exactly imagine it full of people like Armando."

"It's funny," Beatrice remarked, "—more wine, please, Tim!—It's funny, Judith, that you never call William, Bill; especially as he's a sailor."

"I like the ballad associations with William. I think of myself as Black-eyed Susan weeping among the shrouds, every time he sails."

"Oh—h—h!" cried Mab, her wayward thoughts suddenly entangled by this. "But did she die, then? Was it the same Billy of the song:

> "'Where've you been to all this day, my boy Billy?
> Where've you been to all this day, my boy Billy?
> I have been all this day
> Courting with a lady gay,
> But she is too young to be taken from her Mammy—'"

"That's you, Loveday," Martin pointed out.
And they all chorused:

> "But she is too young to be taken from her Mammy!"

Mab Otway was, in her own way, a brilliant conversationalist. She chopped ruthlessly into the conversation, dragged it away in an opposite direction, and, when she had reduced the whole company to incoherence, returned with an air of bewildered reproach to what had previously been left unfinished and was meanwhile forgotten: "Black-eyed Susan? But Judith *said* a shroud, didn't she? Oh—h—h! I wonder if that's why the nine of diamonds is unlucky?"

"Lots more spaghetti, please," said Loveday. "It's not expensive, is it, Judith? So I can eat as much of it as I like?

I remember something about the nine of diamonds in history; I wasn't listening at the time they told me, but it stuck. Black Somebody—and that's where Mab joined in—wrote a message on it for somebody to be massacred the next day."

"Oh—h—h!" cried Mab, catching joyously at the gossamer theme of massacres. "Was that the time when—"

"If you want to hear what Armando has just said to his friend," Judith interrupted, "I'll translate for you: 'Yes, there were artichokes growing here among the roses, but the *Padrone* dug them up.' 'What? Dug up the artichokes; not the roses?' This was his incredulous friend. 'Yes, dug them up. The English, you see, are not educated to artichokes!' And, by the way, as Mab would say, meaning that one thing has nothing to do with another, except in the muddled warp and woof of her brain, I've just had a letter from Jean Ravenhill."

"What does she say?"

"Her usual society-column chatter: that nothing is being danced in London except the Flat Charleston; that Black Bottom is coming in; that that new night-club, the Rumour, is a huge success; and that the best show on at the moment is *Brass-Tacks*—dear Jean, she hasn't got the brains of a white rabbit.—Sorry, Beechy!—Oh, and she says that Petal Soper has fallen headlong in love with an architect called Tom Reid, and is engaged to be married to him!"

CHAPTER II

"A NEAR WAY—A CLEAR WAY"

JUDITH was in Loveday's room, after lunch, looking through Loveday's possessions, with a firm intention of removing any of her own that she might chance to find there. This was an old-established custom, and Loveday could not fairly object; she was merely wont to be a little wistful about the reappropriation. So that Judith did not give a guilty start now, on being found rummaging in Loveday's top drawer, when Loveday herself rushed in. She only remarked, without turning: "I'm getting anxious about you, darling. Not a single one of my handkerchiefs or belts or stockings, not even a gilt safety-pin!"—She became aware that Loveday was not attending.

"Judith, I've got to go back to England. Now, at once!"

"Why?"

"Because of Petal getting married. Judith darling, do get on the bed and out of the way while I pack my suit-case. When is the next train? Hell! The thing's locked. Never had a key, I'm sure, so how did I lock it? You will lend me the money, won't you, Judith? I'll pay you back the minute I'm married."

Judith lit a cigarette, put herself out of the way on the bed, as requested, and watched Loveday, tense, delirious, unsystematic, and happy. She watched her for a few moments in silence; then said: "What's it all about?"

"I've had my sign! Don't you see, Judith? You *must* see. Why, I've been waiting all these months, and if I'm not there, I shall miss it. I've been waiting and waiting. Now Petal's going to be married—Petal's going to be married. He'll be free!"

"Charles?" Judith had heard something of Loveday's career in London during the autumn and winter; not quite all. "But

he hadn't been sharing his mother's flat, or keeping her, or anything of that sort. Why should he be more free now?"

"It's a different sort of freedom. I could hear a snap—when you read your divine blessed letter from that mutt Jean. He won't be held any more, after this; he won't be—enchanted. Judith, you know Petal?"

"Petal-to-my-friends? Yes, I know her; not very well. Not as well as Beechy knows her. Beechy adores her. But Petal never quite—put it over, with me."

"Nor with me," said Loveday, fiercely. She dropped the miscellaneous garments she was holding, and squatted, for a moment's pause, in pixy position, on the floor facing Judith; knees together, feet wide apart, hands clasping her ankles. "Do you know Judith, when I was at school, we had a game—one of those awful games that were rather fun if you were doing them yourself, and not looking on: We used to make a girl Poi, and no one could go near her, or touch her, or they'd be Poi, themselves! And then no one could go near *them*, like catching an illness. Poi for poison, of course. I remember shrieking and running from a Poi girl. . . . It seemed dreadfully real. Grown-ups never knew what it was about; they'd hear us screaming: 'Poi! Poi!' and see us scuttling away; and some wretched little blob crying like anything."

"What an ass of a game!" laughed Judith.

"Yes—no. Anyhow, I enjoyed it. But, Judith, Petal's Poi!"

Judith nodded. "Yes. She doesn't know it, of course. She never will. And Charles—"

Spurred to fresh energy at the name, Loveday sprang up and again began to spin and toss her possessions about in that fantastic saraband which she performed so often and called Packing-in-a-Hurry.

"Charles is free, now. He'll . . . *see* me, now. He'll want me. But if I'm not there at that moment, it'll slump again. Yes, really, Judith. Don't look at me as though I were quee. I know! I know! I'm always right when I feel like this—this sort of deep-sea swell and heave inside me. Like Joan of Arc, listening. Only much more certain. That's why I've been doing noth-

ing all this time. No sign from anywhere. But yesterday—I don't know why a bit, but I prayed to St. Elvan. These Cornish saints, they *do* like being given a lift, you know. They're so dreadfully minor, nobody takes any notice of them. But I'm Cornish, and Father's people came from quite near there, and Elvan's awfully like Elvaston, so I just put it to him in a chummy sort of way: 'If I get you clients,' I said, 'will you barge round and do things for me?' Well, he's barged. Judith, you will encourage Darling-angel St. Elvan a bit, now, won't you? Now that I've proved he's a good one!"

Judith looked at her—and marvelled; she marvelled that anyone so wise, in spasms, could also be such a persistent little horror. But she did not argue with Loveday. The child did, indeed, appear to be gifted with some primitive instincts and judgments that hitherto, at any rate, had led her away from destruction, rather than deeper into the abyss; but because, a modern girl, she was ashamed to trust to anything so simple as an instinct, she found odd trumpery little superstitions, pegs on which to hang them—saints, and numbers, and the letters of her name.

"I love rootling about till I find a saint that nobody's ever used before; and there are thousands in the Cornish Calendar. I expect they were all tradesmen, really, that got sainted when it was still quite cheap. There are seven letters in my name, you know, Judith, and seven and nine are my numbers. So when I was in that awful mess at Budapest, I made a sort of imaginary ring of them around me: St. Cleer and St. Keyne, St. Kadoc, St. Kevin, St. Kew, St. Neot, St. Veep, and St. Michael Penkevil. How many does that make? Eight? Oh, I remember, I had to sling out St. Veep, but I kept St. Michael Penkevil and made him a sort of leader of all the rest; and then I challenged them all in a nice encouraging sort of way, to do something about it quick, and get my fare back to England, because that beast von Tadelheim had had one good try to settle on me, that night, and he'd be sure to have another tomorrow unless I could get off to England. Well, you know, Judith—did I ever tell you this? I didn't, did I? Something

urged me to go out into the corridor. It was five o'clock in the morning, and one doesn't usually go into hotel corridors then. I waited. I was still in evening dress, cold and shivery. We didn't get back from the Papagaly until three o'clock. And I said: 'Do buck up!' to my seven minor saints, 'or I'll swap you for another seven.' I said it quite reverently, Judith. But I couldn't help wondering if it would have been better if I'd slipped in St. Clether, St. Constantine, and St. Michael Caerhays. Judith, why do you look at me as though I were Loveday the Nineteenth, surnamed The Feeble-minded? You *do* think I'm right to go off to England? I don't mind a bit if you don't, because I know it. I know it. It's now or never. Charles is that sort of man. If I'm there now, just on top of my moment, I shall be all right for ever. Petal's getting married. Petal's getting married. What luck, Poi! Poi! Poi!" she chanted, hilariously; her eyes a blazing blue.

Judith suggested drily: "You left me planted with seven Cornish saints in the corridor of a hotel in Hungary, at five o'clock in the morning!"

"Oh, yes. I forgot. And then Pinkie came out from another room. I'd seen her dancing at the Moulin Rouge, that evening. I don't believe she was any older than I was, and her lay was to be all dewy and fresh and pleased about the K.P. men who asked her to hop about on the floor. I saw her go off with one of them, the richest, and he looked all dithered up and infatuated, so I wasn't a bit surprised to see her come out of a room of the hotel, in her cloak. She came out pretty quickly, with a sort of whoosh, as though someone were hurrying her from inside. I expected he wanted her out of the way before all the cleaners and porters and people were let loose in the hotel. Somehow we got talking, she and I, in bad French. She told me lots about her life."

"Shades of your mother!" murmured Judith. And Loveday's eyes twinkled.

"I know! I thought of Mummy, once or twice. It's amusing, Judith, how often one thinks of Mummy. She used to appear

in front of me like Hamlet's father's ghost, in the most quee places. I asked Pinkie if she enjoyed it: men, and nights in hotels, and all that? She said she didn't mind, and why not come into the business, so to speak? Well, naturally, I wasn't shocked; that sort of thing doesn't shock me. But I explained to her nicely how I was cold-blooded, and didn't like that side of courtship, much. I don't, you know, Judith. Not from just any man; or even when I'm a little bit in love with them. I like the entertaining side of it, when they make a fuss of me, and I can be rather lordly, and feel frightfully well with myself, and dash round in cars. I could manage, if I were really hard put to it, to get a sort of melted-by-ecstasy look into my eyes, and go all dreamy and voluptuous; but that doesn't seem to me fair, because I never feel a thing, not a thing—" and she added in a low voice: "unless it's Charles—"

"Quite a lot of people wouldn't consider any of it 'fair,' Loveday."

"What? My lay?"

"You're rather a young robber, aren't you?"

"I wouldn't rob a blind man. Any more than knock down an old woman. But, Judith—why shouldn't it be fair, when they know exactly that they're staking on a chance, to let them stake? It's *their* gamble. If they're not deaf nor half-witted nor in a trance, if I don't hypnotize nor chloroform them. . . . Judith, I'm not a humbug; I never even pretended to be a passionate one. Truly. But men, most of them, find it so dreadfully hard to believe that I'm not a disguised throbber —except when it's to other men. They quite understand that those *other* bounders can't stir me. . . . Then I say, all open and sunny: 'What I really want is for you to give me a good time, which I've not a hope of getting otherwise; and plenty of presents! In return I'll—keep company with you!—literally.' The nicest girl can't be a more candid one than that. They can judge, then, if my company's worth it. What's to prevent them running? I haven't tied them hand and foot. Have I got to protect *them,* too? Protect them against myself? Why? It's

the same high seas and black flag for us all. Pinkie quite agreed with me, except that *she* enjoys her lay to the finish, to the last bedtime story!"

"I'd have given worlds to hear you and Pinkie, and your schoolgirl chat on sex," Judith remarked. "Where did it land you?"

"It landed me with six million kronen," answered Loveday, triumphantly. "A great wadge of notes that she pulled out of her stocking, just as he must have given them to her a few minutes before. It *was* generous of her, and she didn't make a fuss, either, or pat herself on the back; she just kissed me and laughed, and said she'd try and make von Tadelheim pay for my journey home, after all. . . . What do you think she could have meant, Judith?"

"Don't go on that wide-eyed lay with me!" said Judith. "Did you tell Charles this pretty little tale for the bairns?"

"Mm. Of course I did. Oh, Charles was a sport about that. He loved it. He was in his Gentleman's Relish mood, that first part of the evening I came back; real Patum Peperium. It was the silver coat that upset him. His moral digestion is an absolute freak, but I'll get the hang of it all right. Oh, I'm going to be so good, Judith. I feel it stealing over me. Do I look sort of quietly radiant, as though unknown people would be the better for my passing by, and wonder where it came from?—Hell!" with a sudden complete change of voice. "Oh, blast! Hell! Damnation! Hell, *how* am I to get back now?"

"Darling, what is it?"

"Haven't got a passport," said Loveday, grimly. "I told you Judith, I burnt it. Hell! Why do I do these things? Now I'm stuck. Judith, do you think they'd let me through, without?"

"No, my dear, I know they wouldn't. They don't, you know, not for all the saints of Cornwall!"

"Shut up! Don't laugh at me! Can't you see—" Loveday stamped her foot—"can't you see that everything hangs on this?—my whole life? everything that matters? I've got to get back. What can I do?"

"How long did the Consul say it would take before you could have your new one?"

"A fortnight. And that's only five days ago. Anyway, there'd be a lot of fuss if I applied before it was ready, and Mummy would know. He's such a fatherly one, at Porto Rinaldo; he'd be sure to go straight to Mummy."

"Loveday, it can't make all that difference if you wait another ten days. I mean, if Charles really cares."

"It does, I tell you. I know. I must manage things, myself, when I know as certain as this. Don't talk sense to me, Judith, I simply can't bear it. . . . I beg your pardon if I'm being rude and sickening. . . . I know this is your house and I'm your guest—*don't talk sense!*"

Judith shrugged her shoulders—and went.

Loveday flung herself full length on to the bed, and brooded, stormily. She only knew that nothing was going to stop her—certainly not such a trifling object as a passport. Passport?—the word seemed so recent, somehow. Who'd been talking about passports?—much more lately than when she had burnt hers for fear that her mother should see the Hungarian visas.

. . . Then that phrase of her own about the nine of diamonds drifted back, as though she were calling in every topic she could remember, till the right one came. "I didn't listen at the time, but it stuck.". . . *Something* had stuck! What was it? . . . "Black-eyed Susan. . . . No. . . . Oh, what *was* it?" She drummed impatiently on the bed with her clenched fists. "Ballads . . . Mab coming out with the letters, and Judith saying it was like Ophelia handing out rue for remembrance. Yes, that's it. That's nearer . . . letters . . . passports . . . Timothy— *Got* it!" cried Loveday, springing to her feet.

In a moment her plans were all settled—quite ruthless plans, with only the captivation and subsequent consent of Timothy Somerset still left doubtful. Not very doubtful. Loveday's smile curled with a hint of roguish malice, a spice of disdain for Timothy's powers of resistance. And wasn't it a further sign that she was meant to go to England, that the Somersets had

a double passport? that Beatrice was not going? that Timothy had to go?

Had he said Friday or Saturday? Tomorrow was Friday. By all the saints of Cornwall, she was going to England, to Charles. He had sent for her, not by letter, certainly, not by any tangible message. . . . That was how Judith would argue. Loveday sat on the edge of the bed, her shoulders hunched forward, her chin resting on her folded arms, her long legs sprawling straight in front of her. She sat there, plotting, with a buccaneer's scowl for her enemies; her eyes concentrating hard on the fulfilment of her plans. She was trying to decide whether or not she should tell Judith of her intended flight. . . .

Well . . . no. No. Perhaps it was better not. "In some ways," reflected Loveday, "I'm more practical than Judith; she doesn't see how really necessary it is for me to go back tomorrow or the day after, and she might talk a lot of stuff about Beatrice minding. Though I don't see why Beatrice should. If little Pinkie could help me out of a hole, a stranger and a tart and not half as educated as Beatrice, and at five in the morning, too, then, after all, one's own countrywoman—" So she argued, against an absent Judith. . . . Then, finding that, in spite of all, an absent Judith remained stubbornly opposed to this really delectable plan of going to England as Timothy's wife on Timothy's passport: "Oh, Hell!" quoth Loveday. "I'll do it, anyway, and put it right, somehow, afterwards."

CHAPTER III

"SHE'S JUST KIND O' WILD"

THIS was the moment of tension, waiting their turn in the queue at Ventimiglia, to have their passports examined. When this was safely over, thought Loveday, there need not be another qualm until they reached Dover. And Dover was so near the end of her journey, she would then be so near to London and Charles, that she would be equal to any amount of fuss; anyhow, nothing could happen to you in England.

Meanwhile here they were, getting nearer now. . . . Such a crowd, surely the man sitting behind the table did not bother to examine each passport properly?—Loveday was tall and able to peer over the shoulders of the mob. She breathed a tremendous sigh of relief—the man barely glanced at the passports, gave them a perfunctory stamp, and handed them to another man beside him—who gave each one another perfunctory stamp. How unmeaning it all was! What a blessed relief when the passport would be handed back to Timothy and they would be free to race through the barrier, and up the platform to their train!

. . . Nearer, now. The people from behind were pushing her, breathing heavily, digging their hand-luggage into her shins.

"It *will* be all right, won't it?" Loveday whispered to Timothy, who smiled at her; but she could see that he was anxious, too. Her spirits, which that morning, on creeping out of the Casa dei Sette, had been so high, now sank a little. Ought she not to have done it?

Only nine more people in front of them . . . eight . . . seven . . . the man was doing it almost too quickly . . . five . . . four . . . three. . . .

—No one of Judith's house party had seen her go; or rather they might have seen her racing, as she often did, in the early morning, towards the olive-groves, wearing her usual shorts and jumper. But hidden where the trees were closest, hidden by Timothy the night before, while they were all dancing in the verandah-room, had been Loveday's suit-case—ah, that eternal suit-case of a thousand and one flights!—and her travelling-clothes. She had crouched down and changed them, there, among the white wild garlic and blue borage that grew in juicy circles round each olive trunk. That had been fun, all that! An adventure! . . . She was going to Charles. And Timothy had been such a darling, so full of zest, so ready to help in the enterprise, so indifferent to whatever blame might afterwards be attached to him. . . .

But now—now, he had actually handed over his passport.

The first man barely glanced at it, stamped it, and handed it to the man beside him. Loveday was so gloriously reassured that she smiled at this second man—the loveliest and most infectious of smiles. He, jaded though he was, could not help being startled at the friendliness of the tall golden patrician *Inglese*. She was not a type to go unnoticed, anywhere. Gallantly he smiled back. And his interest thoroughly awakened by now, stamper poised, he looked at her photograph.

Looked at Beatrice's photograph. . . .

"Oh, Tim," whispered Loveday. "I daren't go in. Don't the lights in the verandah-room look ominous, somehow? Do you think we're going to land in a hell of a row?"

Timothy nodded. The events of the last few hours had entirely quenched his optimism. He and Loveday stood there, at the foot of the steep garden path, like two children resigned to a scolding, yet postponing the evil moment. Loveday clung tightly to his arm.

"*Don't* let's go in! Let's stop out here, where it's warm and dark. No, I'm not going to funk— Come on, Tim. I don't feel too terribly intrepid, but I'll go in first. Tim, there's a—a

back door, I know. If I slipped in and they found me tomorrow, or even tonight, just peacefully asleep in my bed, with my cheek pillowed on my hand, all rather trustful, they wouldn't have the heart to wake me, would they, Tim? And you the same. Aren't there millions of fire-flies? Look!"

Timothy suddenly began to shake with laughter. "We can't *both* be found sleeping trustfully! . . . Come on, Loveday. Judith won't tick you off, anyway; she's a pal." He moved forward. Loveday pulled him back. His foot crunched on the cobbles, and now, hysterically, she, too, began to laugh. Suddenly, as though a spring had been released, all the seven dogs, from their kennels or from the upper terraces of the garden, started a ferocious barking; the silence was shattered into tumult. Timothy and Loveday shrank and cowered. They were normally the best of friends with Judith's dogs, but the scene which followed their detection at the frontier had completely drained their nerves.

The front door was flung open, and a voice called out: "Who is it?"

"Judith," whispered Loveday; "and she sounds furious. You answer, Tim." Her fingers dug and clenched into his shoulder.

"Who is it?" called out Judith, again. "Who's whispering?" Then, after a long pause, as though something had betrayed the identity of the couple standing motionless where the shadows began: "Loveday!" she called out.

"Yes, Judith, it's me. I—I'm sorry," quavered Loveday.

Judith switched on the light over the porch, and the culprits moved forward till they could clearly be seen; Loveday wondering whether she should apologize first, or wait until given a lead.

But Judith ignored her, and merely said to Timothy: "We've had a ghastly day with Beechy. What are you going to say to her?"

"Tell her it's all my fault," chimed in Loveday, quickly, seeing that Timothy had gone rather white.

Judith remarked, not without irony: "Curiously enough, she

knows that. No, Loveday mustn't see her at all. Not tonight, anyway. I—I loathe this sort of row. Why have you come back?"

Timothy explained: "They turned us back at the frontier; spotted that the photo in the passport wasn't Loveday. Does Beatrice think—" They were in the hall. The door into the verandah-room was shut; inside, the gramophone was playing.

Judith kept her voice low: "Yes, of course Beatrice thinks. What do you suppose? There's been hell to pay."

"I don't see why," cried Loveday, petulantly. "Do stop receiving us as though we were a funeral, Judith. Of course it was a mad thing to do. But it would have been all right if we'd got through; only we didn't. Anyhow, I don't see why Beatrice need be the one to plunge about and make a fuss. It happens to be her passport that I ran off with, but—"

"It happens to be her husband, too," said Judith. She and Timothy exchanged a look. . . . "She's in there with the others. You'd better help yourself to a stiff whisky and soda first, Tim; you look as though you need it."

"I expect I shall, before I'm done. Right oh, Judith. I'll get one for you, too, Loveday," he added, and disappeared through the dining-room door.

Loveday swung round on Judith. "Judith, you don't mean that all this shindy is because—Beatrice doesn't imagine that it was because of *Tim* that I—"

"Yes. It was the obvious thing to imagine, with you and Timothy bunking off together without telling a soul. Beatrice *is* obvious! And they haven't been getting on too well, lately. You're a hopeless little fool, Loveday. It's not been a pleasant day."

"Beatrice—thought—I'd done a bunk—from this house—with *her* husband?" stammered Loveday, utterly incredulous. Strangely enough, though she was prepared for every shape and size of scolding for her audacity in attempting to get to England on Timothy's passport, and in the rôle of Beatrice Somerset, yet that other version of her escapade—the amorous elopement version—had never once occurred to her until now,

so obsessed had she been with her longing at all costs to get to England and to Charles; so obsessed with her own destiny, that even now she could hardly credit that other individuals might be equally touchy about theirs.

She stared at Judith. . . .

Timothy came out of the dining-room with a glass, which he handed to Loveday. "Champagne," he said, briefly. "You seem to have run out of whisky, Judith; brandy, too; and Loveday's all in."

Loveday drank off the full glass of Lanson 1911. She had eaten nothing for hours. Defiant, she walked straight into the verandah-room. A rush of music greeted her—the Revellers; Mab had put on record after record, for she had been aware, from the first moment of the dogs' barking, who was arriving back at the house.

"Take that thing off!" Loveday commanded briefly. And at once the roomful of people was silent.

Loveday spoke to Beatrice, ignoring the rest: "I'm sorry you've been anxious, and I apologize for trying to use your passport. But I wasn't running away with your husband. Honestly, I wasn't. I wouldn't."

Beatrice Somerset was very flushed. Her eyes glittered, and she pulled the rings about on her fingers in a tense, exasperated fashion. She did not answer Loveday, but looked past her to the door where Timothy stood, and Judith behind him.

—Mab Otway, describing the hectic night afterwards, always said that the worst part of it was the way nobody answered anybody who spoke to them, but turned round, instead, and answered somebody else, who hadn't.

"Hello, Tim! Why have you come back?" asked Beatrice, striving to be casual, in a tone much shriller than its usual pitch.

Judith answered lightly, as though it were an everyday occurrence to cross frontiers on a false passport: "Oh, they actually spotted that Loveday wasn't you. And from a passport photo, too; they're usually too swollen and hideous to betray anything."

"Hard luck!" from Beatrice. "You must have hated having to return, after such a good start!"

Timothy interrupted. He had not believed, when he so easily fell in with Loveday's proposal of a wild ramp through to England, on the same passport, that Beatrice would view it quite as bitterly as now; but he was not as amazed as Loveday. For, indeed, he had been far more romantically aware of the girl than she of him, and there had been rows, in the past, with his wife. . . . "I'm going up to bed, Beechy. I suggest that you come up, too, and hear all about it, if you want to. I'm dead tired."

The boy, Martin Adams, said quickly: "It was a rotten trick to play on Beatrice, to have sneaked her passport. She'll probably get into no end of trouble over it." He had never liked Loveday, and his youthful chivalry had been disturbed by the sight of Beatrice's distress, all through that difficult day.

Stefan and Mab, who alike wished to shield Loveday, and saw that under her defiance she was very nearly at breaking-point, both spoke together now, urging that they, too, should be told all about the excitement at the frontier; thus trying to exchange the present air of overstrained psychology for that of wholesome everyday adventure.

Loveday tossed off her hat, threw it on the floor, and flung herself into an arm-chair. She spoke in a hard, rapid, scornful way, but her eyes avoided Judith's: "Fill my glass, Tim. Let's bust another bottle, or two more bottles. I can't remember exactly what happened. It's all so confusing. . . . Thousands of officials, all shouting; and the crowd shouting, too, like a crowd in a French Revolution play, when they hammer at the doors, and call out: 'Rhubarb! Rhubarb!' . . . I never expected, of course, that there'd be the slightest chance of ever seeing any of you again. Tim was wonderfully controlled. He just answered: "*Non posso italiano!*" to everything that was screamed at him. I turned pathetic and twined, and said my Daddy was dying over in England, and I had to get to him in a hurry, and that I'd lost my passport, and they were making me out another one in Porto Rinaldo,

but it wasn't ready yet, and if I had waited, it might be too late for my Daddy! There were frightfully human hearts beating behind all the uniforms and gadgets. They embraced me, and I embraced them back, and they said: 'Prison!' and I wept. . . . My legs felt so like water that if they'd marched me over an open drain, I'd have just poured away. And then, among other things, they rang up the Vice-Consul at Porto Rinaldo, and he said it was quite true that I *was* having another passport made out for me. That was rather a good one for me. We were marched about from room to room, I think at least fifty times round the station, till I got so giddy I didn't know in the least where I was when they finally released us."

"Oh—h—h!—They *did*, then? I mean—they let you go? I mean—you're definitely here, now? Then what about your father? And would they think that was Beatrice's father or your own? I mean—would they look for Mr. Somerset? Oh, no, his name wouldn't be Somerset, would it? Not before she married."

Loveday's bravado quivered into hysteria. Mab always had this effect on her, although, even in her clouded state of brain, she, and none of the others, could perceive that Mab was deliberately accentuating her own distracted Ophelia style in order to give Loveday's bad evening a better chance of escape into comedy or even farce. Loveday was grateful for it.

"They let us go back, pending further inquiries," said Timothy. "The fuss isn't over yet, by any means. There was no question of letting us through and on to England, and I expect they'll have warned every frontier. They know where we live, and our names, and all about us. It's a serious matter, you see, in the same line as forgery, to try to swap identities on a passport." For, in opposition to Mab, being thoroughly gloomy and upset by now, he thought he might as well make matters worse than they actually were.

The party had gained an addition to its wonted number, an Italian acquaintance of Judith's, Signor Carradore, who had been hospitably told to drop in any night he liked; and, with ruthless instinct, had chosen the present one for his first visit

to the house. He had always hoped to make himself better acquainted with the habits of the English in their own homes—so that he was warmly and amiably absorbing all that had happened, and was still happening. Only he wished that the gentleman sitting on his other side, so charming, so courteous, would yet stop telling him stories of passionate affairs in Russia in royal days long gone by. Any other time, yes. But now, no. Stefan Chernov had indeed plunged into his saga to distract the attention of Signor Carradore; but, as was usual with him, the past soon acquired all its old vitality, and the present was peopled only with shadows. So he went on and on, and Signor Carradore, had he wished, might have been galloping side by side with him in a charge of Cossacks; barbaric splendour, furred and jewelled; carved ivory saddles and chains of gleaming turquoises, amber and opals a-swing from the horses' necks.

". . . They swept forward in three great waves against the machine-gun fire. Over a little hill. And we waited and waited to hear the steady firing broken up by panic at the charge. But it went on. It never broke. That night our leaders rode grimly past what was left of the regiment, and would not speak to officers or men. For we had been defeated. That is where you English are so different," Stefan continued, dreamily, to Signor Carradore. "*Your* leaders would have stopped and spoken cheerily, more so than usual, especially because of the disgrace. We are harsher and simpler, in Russia. . . . There will be no more Cossack charges, in future wars. . . ."

But Signor Carradore thought Stefan was mad. And, while striving to appear polite, pricked his attention only for what that beautiful 'fimmel' of the white hairs, with the fresh complexion and baby mouth, was declaiming in a rage against that less beautiful because far too thin, but so much younger female, who had run away with the husband. "She 'ave passion, then? More than she look 'ave?" They were deceptive, these English fimmels. He had always been told that their evenings were oh, so dull! But tonight, on the contrary . . .

For Beatrice was losing control.

"You never thought if it was fair to me, Tim. Martin's right. They probably won't ever issue another passport for us now; and everyone will get to know about this business, and talk. And all the while and just through this you're missing your chance over in England, with Dawson. You'll be lucky if you don't get sent to prison." Her voice rasped on, low, but insistently audible through Stefan's saga; through the loud songs on the gramophone, which Mab once again, in desperation, was playing; through an argument between Martin and Judith, the former trying to check his hot desire, as Beatrice's partisan, to knock Timothy down. . . . "It's all very well, Tim— Why couldn't you let her manage to get to England by herself? Did you suppose it would be fun for me to hear everybody round me saying—"

Stefan's baritone crashed grandly into the "Song of the Volga Boatmen," which Mab had been inspired to play. Again the pair of them had saved the evening from total and visible disaster. . . .

But Loveday was drinking too much champagne.

Lying in the arm-chair, so that her listless limbs were almost horizontal from head to foot, a look, half sulky, half wrathful, turned on Beatrice from under drawn brows, one hand holding out her empty glass again and again towards Timothy to be filled, without even glancing in his direction as she did so. . . . "In it up to the neck!" thought Loveday.

No hope of getting to Charles. And Judith seemed to be fed up with her, too. "Got to get through the evening, somehow!" . . . Another glass of champagne lifted her spirits—buoyed them up from despair, from sulkiness. Yes, she was feeling better now—impudent, freed from all care or consciousness of how she behaved. Damned, anyway!—so what does it matter? "More champagne! Leave me alone, Mab. I want it, I tell you. You've had plenty yourself, and I've been through more than you today. Mab, isn't Beechy a scream? I shall howl with laughing in a moment, if she goes on hissing at Tim. Darling-angel Tim! I'll remember how decent he was! What

a hateful boy that is!" She glowered at Martin, who glowered back. "Why's he got a down on me? Put on 'Bye, Bye, Blackbird,' Mab. . . .

> "'Pack up all my cares and woe . . .
> Here I go, swinging low,
> Bye, Bye, Blackbird—'

Judith hasn't got 'Limehouse Blues,' has she? Good old has-been, but rather fetching. . . .

> "'Oh, Limehouse Blues, oh, oh, oh, Limehouse kid,
> Going—
> The way that—
> The rest of them
> Did!'"

A vision of Lamb-Bird, uneasy, protesting, appeared and vanished. . . .

"Poor Mummy! Judith, do you remember when Mummy—" But it was no good. Judith would not even look at her. And everybody else was looking at her too much: Martin in reproach; Carradore in astonishment; only Stefan continued to behave like an Englishman; with the difference that the English, for good form's sake, affect not to notice when there is trouble in the air, whereas Stefan really did not notice it—beyond the right of the soul to take liberties and liberty when and where it pleased. So he remained the only serene and dependable person in the room.

". . . Two divans, one at either end of the room. Not the ball-room, but a very dark empty room. So I thought I could rest there, as I do not dance. But I saw on one a spur and a flounce of skirt. And on the other? A spur and a flounce of skirt. So I retired and sat and smoked outside. Presently they came out. The Crown Prince of Roumania . . . with a lady. And then—the Crown Prince of Germany, with a lady." Stefan paused, smiling. And he hummed a valse, the old *Merry Widow* valse. . . .

—"Do come upstairs!" said Timothy roughly, in an aside to

his wife, for the third time. "I'm not going to have all this in public, I tell you."

And this time she consented.

Loveday called out lazily after them: "Good-night, Tim angel. You can kiss me if you like, because of all you've done; and thanks a hundred thousand million times. Oh, and as you're up, you might fill my glass. I spilt the last lot. Mab jogged my arm. On purpose, bless her. She thinks I've had too much. But we *must* toast Petal's wedding, mustn't we? Cheerio to Petal! Petal's getting married! Poi Petal! Poi Beechy!" she added. "Poi! *Poi!*"—And she held her glass aloft to drink this last toast.

Martin reached forward and knocked it out of her hand. It crashed on to the tiles. Loveday laughed. Beatrice had already gone upstairs with Judith. Now she could let rip her last trace of decent behaviour. . . .

"Isn't Stefan being too adorable!"—Impulsively her fancy attached itself to Stefan. She curled up beside him on the divan, naughtily ignoring Signor Carradore on the other side; besought the Russian to be nice to her, as everybody else was so cross; over and over again she asked him if he were cross, too? She tried to mimic for him how she and Timothy had that evening crawled, quaking, up the dark pathway of the Casa dei Sette, justifying herself eagerly with a shower of events and names that conveyed no meaning to him: Jean's letter . . . Petal getting married . . . von Tadelheim. . . . "So you see I *had* to!—You *do* understand, darling Stefan, don't you? It's not a bit like Judith to take Beechy's side, instead of mine. Of course I made it up about Daddy dying over in England; but I had to get Tim out of it somehow, because it was my own fault. But if Daddy hadn't died—that was thirteen years ago, but seven's my lucky number—I shouldn't have been so utterly hopeless. He would never have let me drink so much champagne. Mab tried not to let me, but it's none of her business—" and an angry look shot from the narrowed brilliance of her eyes, sea-blue, across the room to Mab, who was consulting with Timothy on the best

way of stopping Loveday's mad swing of spirits; or not stopping them, but letting them rush on and exhaust themselves. Stefan was a safe man, that was one thing, however the little fool carried on. Stefan's breeding and serenity were equal to any crisis. If only Carradore would go; if only there were no onlooker! If Loveday's friends could form a close ring about Loveday and protect her . . . "I do wish Judith needn't have put on the black cap until Loveday had had a night's sleep. Judith is justified, of course; but it's rather leaving us in the lurch, now. Oh—h—h. . . . I know what I can do!" And Mab did it.

Apparently as temperamental as Loveday herself, she dashed into open brazen flirtation with Signor Carradore, who already had shown signs that he found her not unpleasing. Two minutes later she had decoyed him out into the garden to smell the night-scented stock. Presently she could be seen chasing fire-flies, with little screams and oh—h—h's. Her chasing led her farther and farther down the hill. Romeo Carradore followed her. Quite soon he found himself, as though by accident, outside the gates of his own house; it did not seem worth while for him to go back—especially, Mab pointed out, as his hostess had already retired upstairs with Mrs. Somerset, who was not feeling well. Carradore clicked his heels, and bowed three times in acknowledgment of the fact that Beatrice Somerset was, indeed, not feeling very well. Then he pressed a pulsing kiss on Mab's hand, another on her forearm, and offered to escort her back again to Casa dei Sette.

"But I want to be alone!" cried Mab, in a sort of improvised banshee wail. "All my family love to be alone at midnight, especially when there's no moon. Some go mad if they're not. Oh—h—h! How wonderful of you to understand!" And she flitted up the hill again, actually a martyr in Loveday's cause, because she disliked and feared the mule-track alone in the dark. But she was not going to risk bringing back the visitor, now that she had so cleverly shed him.

She wondered what development she would find, or what abatement of civil war, on her return to the house? It seemed

very silent, and the lights in the verandah-room had been quenched. Perhaps the entire party had gone to bed. Perhaps that was the end of it all, for that night. So she slipped in by the back door. And met Judith on the stairs.

At once she knew that the trouble had not yet evaporated in dreams and sleep. . . .

"And what have *you* been doing?" Judith demanded, in semi-humorous resignation.

Mab, not without pride, told her.

"That was a good move. Mab, I—I don't quite know what to do!"

"Why? Where's everybody?"

"Timothy and Martin quarrelled, the stupid oafs. I came down in the middle of it and found them in the dining-room, going at it hammer and tongs. Well, that was easy enough to cope with. I felt like the old woman who lived in the shoe; and behaved like her: I smacked them both soundly, and sent them to bed—in the same room. I had just left Beatrice. I made her take a sleeping-draught, and she was dropping off. I didn't think Timothy had better join her tonight, or they'd start preparing divorces again. So I asked Martin to be kind enough to fix up Timothy with pyjamas and hairbrushes and things!"

Mab sat down on the stairs and began to giggle. "It's terribly funny!"

"Yes, it is, in a way. At any rate, if they *are* going to fight, they can do it now like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, dressed up in pillows and bolsters; and we needn't know anything till we sweep them up in bits, tomorrow morning."

"But, I say—where's Loveday?"

"In the verandah-room."

"It's dark in there!"

"Yes, I know. Pitch-black. Stefan's in there, too, and the door's closed."

"Oh—h—h!—But that's nothing. The boys, Timothy and Martin, must have banged it behind them."

"Mab—I don't like to go in. Loveday's in her maddest

mood, and—I've always been afraid of what might happen when she's like this; when everything she cares tuppence about has crashed."

"Has it?" asked Mab, her lips parted, a deep rut of perplexity between her eyes.

"Yes—more or less. And Chernov's an attractive, a romantic figure—just to go on with. He's a nobleman, you know, but not a saint."

"Oh—h—h—but, Judith—Loveday's had too much champagne."

"Of course she has. Little ruffian! That's just it."

Mab shook her head. "No, *that* makes it all right. *She* might; but *he* wouldn't. Stefan's decent. If she were quite herself, and still reckless of what she did or who she did it with, then he, or any other man, might say: 'Why not?' But as it is—it's all right, Judith; I know it is."

"That's all very well," said Judith; "I don't like to go in. And I can't hear anything without deliberately listening. Which I won't. I'm not old-fashioned, and I like my guests to enjoy themselves, but I'm responsible for the child. I wish I had packed her straight home to her mother, the minute she arrived here, but the old lady had just been so damn rude to me that—well, I didn't. Of course I ought to have. A mother's a mother. If William were at home now; he could call Stefan, on some pretext. I can't call Loveday without being Grundyish."

"I didn't know this sort of house party happened, in real life!" gasped Mab, shaken again with spasms of laughter. She could not help thinking of the sequence of ridiculous tableaux, culminating with herself and Judith whispering on the stairs about what might or might not be the problem of the wicked Russian and the fair young English girl, shut up together in the verandah-room at midnight. . . .

"Damn!" muttered Judith. "I expect I was hard on her; but for once I did see Beechy's side of it. And, anyhow, Loveday might have told me beforehand."

"That's schoolgirlish," said Mab. "Look here, Judy, we've got to interrupt them, even if they're not. . . ."

"I might have, ten minutes ago. I've worked myself up into being self-conscious about it, now."

"Can't we invent something? Something urgent? A telegram? No, there couldn't be, at this time.—What? What is it, Judith?"

"You *are* a genius," cried Judith. "Half the time you don't know you are, but—there was a telegram!"

"What? When? Who?"

"For Loveday. It arrived in the middle of all the fuss this morning, and I'd forgotten. It's in the dining-room. Here, Mab. Will you take it in?"

Mab seized the buff-coloured oblong, and rushed boisterously, banging doors and shouting Loveday's name, into the inscrutable mystery of the verandah-room. . . .

"Loveday! Loveday! Are you in here? Oh—h—h—h, it's quite dark! Are you asleep? Whereabouts is the switch? There's a telegram for you. We quite forgot, till now. *Loveday!*" In spite of affected hilarity, her voice shook. Had Judith been right, after all? Why did nobody answer?

. . . Then came Stefan's voice, normal, kind as ever, unruffled: "Can you find the light? She is asleep, but I think she is waking. I did not like to disturb her."

Mab switched on the light.

Loveday was lying on the divan, snuggled comfortably in Stefan's arms. She opened her eyes wide, blinked, smiled at Mab, and cuddled down again.

"You see," said Stefan, "she thinks I am a cushion!"

Mab could have hugged him. After their heated, lurid anxieties, his marvellously quiet acceptance of everything was like a spray of cool water.

"What is it?" exclaimed Loveday, startled, pushing back her hair. "Where am I? Is it late?" She seemed dazed, but more clear-headed than before she had yielded to drowsiness.

Judith came in and, crossing to Loveday, slipped an arm

round her shoulders. She did it casually; but Loveday understood, and cuddled up to Judith with the same happy submission at being petted, forgiven, and comforted, as previously with Stefan.

"Did anyone say telegram?"

Mab handed it to her. Loveday tore it open. Her fingers shook. Perhaps it was from Charles. . . . No, she pushed away that thought. She had the sensation of having behaved disgracefully, though she did not quite remember when or how, and so she did not want to be reminded of Charles. She read the message, first to herself, then aloud: " 'Return at once why no letter displeased Trevelyan.' " . . . And once again, for the second time that evening, the image of a cross, indignant, dumpy little figure in black trotted into the room. . . . Repeated: "Displeased. Trevelyan." . . . Vanished again. . . .

—"From Mummy!" gasped Loveday. "Oh, how just like Mummy to send me a telegram like that; actually to write it down! Judith, you know Mummy!—Can't you see her *displeased?* 'Why shouldn't I send my daughter a telegram if I want to? After all, I *am* her mother!' Judith! Judith!" . . . Loveday could not cease from wild, frightened laughter. Judith, too, who knew Laura Trevelyan; and Mab, who had caught a glimpse of her from the window of the train at Porto Rinaldo—all three were tickled by something indescribably, irresistibly, inconsequently funny just in the wording of that one line: "Return at once why no letter displeased Trevelyan." Mab and Judith added to their crescendo of mirth the secret ironical knowledge of how they had purposed using the telegram as a convenient excuse for the interruption of—Well, Mrs. Trevelyan would certainly never know; nor would Loveday guess; nor Stefan Chernov.

Stefan Chernov, indeed, could not see that the telegram was funny; nor that the night had been in any way Russian. And when Loveday relapsed again into stupor with the same abruptness as she had awakened from it, murmuring: "Beechy's Poi. I do love you, Stefan. I want to be put to bed!"—he good-humouredly lifted her in his arms, and said: "I am

strong. I will carry her up. Tomorrow she will have forgotten all this."

Judith and Mab were left alone on the empty stage.

"I do love you, Stefan," murmured Mab, inquiringly.

"Displeased, Trevelyan," answered Judith. "Oh, well—Shall we turn out the lights, Mab?"

CHAPTER IV

THE LOST HOUR OF LOVEDAY

STEFAN'S prophecy fulfilled itself; Loveday slept on heavily until breakfast-time the following morning; and on being shaken out of her slumber by Mab, and given a vivid though incoherent description of all she had said and done the evening before, refused point-blank to believe it. She leapt from her bed and ran barefoot, helter-skelter, into Judith's room.

"Judith, what's all this? Mab's mad! Judith, I didn't, did I? Mab says that Stefan and I . . . *Judith!*"

"I trust not, indeed, dear child. But time will show. I'm just going down to breakfast, so buck up."

"I think you're all mad but me!" gasped Loveday, beginning to feel uneasy about her lost hour. "I'm going to ask Stefan, myself."

Judith pulled her back. "You'd better remain sizzling in the frying-pan," she advised. "The fire's hot. But don't worry, Loveday. I'm sure you're still a nice girl. You drank too much champagne; that's all."

Loveday's head drooped. She knew how Judith felt about such performances. . . .

"I'm so sorry," she whispered. "Is there anything I can do for anybody, to show I'm sorry? Shall I climb the mule-track on my bended knees or something? Oh, Judith, you must hate me! Was I awful? You can't think how quee it is not being able to remember. Did I insult anybody? Oh! I hope I insulted Beatrice!"

Judith laughed, but refused altogether to reassure Loveday about her reprehensible conduct.

Loveday mournfully returned to her own room; washed in cold water, partly because she felt she should do penance,

partly because she liked it; slipped on the sand-shoes, shorts, and fuchsia-coloured jumper, which composed her entire summer costume; and, quaking, half-defiant, half-apprehensive, but determined to carry off her entrance into the dining-room with as high courage as possible, rushed downstairs.

They were all assembled, except Beatrice, who had been persuaded to remain in bed with a headache.

"Please, good-morning, everybody!" cried Loveday.

By haphazard, not a chair had been left for her. Timothy, Stefan, and Martin all sprang up at once, with a clatter, and offered her theirs. Loveday wooingly, warily, selected Martin's. For he had not yet capitulated.

"I'm not sure if I ought to sit down at all. I'm in disgrace. Oughtn't I to run round and endear myself and do things for people—propitiate them? Judith angel, let me cut the bread. Look here, isn't anyone going to tell me what I did, last night? Stefan—" with a bold dive into frankness—"you must know most about it, they tell me. They say I was found in your arms, after hours in the dark. That does look bad, doesn't it?"

"You slept," said Stefan, "and I did not like to disturb you. So you see you need not worry; there is nothing wrong in sleeping after a journey."

"Did I still look like a gnat while I was asleep?" asked Loveday, profoundly interested. "Can no one else tell me what I did? I'm collecting evidence against myself. I think it's rather mean of all of you to laugh. After all, *you* can remember perfectly well what you did with your evening, and I can't. Oh dear, I know I ought to grovel and prostrate myself, and be frightfully criminal; but instead of that I've got an enormous appetite, and feel really fresh and well. Judith, that proves, doesn't it, that my subconscious can't be in a guilty, crawling, cheesy state, or it wouldn't be able to eat?"

"I don't think it is your subconscious, eating," said Judith. "Still, we won't interfere with your breakfast. Have some more bacon?"

"No, I thank you, dear Judith. You are so much too good

to me." Loveday passed her plate. Then she slanted a tentative glance at Timothy; another at Stefan. It was plain that she was not quite untroubled in her mind as to what parts these two might have played in her unremembered past. . . .

"Loveday!" cried Mab, suddenly; "I wonder if you've forgotten—? No, wait a minute!" She jumped up and ran into the verandah-room, where she scuffled for a moment in the waste-paper basket, and returned with a telegram, which she triumphantly held upside down in front of Loveday. "Well?" she queried, "Well?"

Loveday stared at it blankly. "Ought it to touch the spot? Am I giving myself away hopelessly? Perhaps if somebody kind and sympathetic were to tell me what was in it—"

"'Displeased, Trevelyan!'" quoted Mab, in sonorous tones.

"*Mummy!* Of course I remember. There's a sort of cloudy wash-out before and after, but I do remember that, and we all laughing. I don't think I want to laugh, this morning. The joke's gone flat. Let's count up how many people are displeased with me: Mummy, to begin with; and the Italian Government, that's two; and your wife, Timothy—isn't she?" with a drop into genuine timidity.

Tim Somerset admitted that Loveday's stock was not too high with Beatrice.

"That's three. Then there's Judith. She has more or less forgiven me; but, of course, I've caused a lot of trouble. I don't think she's too pleased, yet. Are you, Judith?"

"When I consider that I've got to spend the whole of this lovely day interviewing the *Questore* of this province, on your behalf, instead of bathing; and that he lives two hours away from here, by train; and that I shall have to use my influence in Italian, and I'm not really a linguist, my soul does feel slightly hot and dusty at mention of your name, Loveday; and it's no good pretending that it doesn't."

Timothy asked: "Do you think you'll be able to put things right? Have you any sort of pull with him?"

"Yes. He's a very good friend of ours, really. And he may

be able to straighten things about the passport. He's a very powerful man, round here. I'll do what I can, anyway."

"I'll run you over in the car," Martin offered. "Not so hot and jolty as the train." And he added, pointedly, in his very boyish intolerance—for he considered that Loveday was making matters worse instead of better by all this frank discussion of her sins—"I should think poor Beechy would be a little less worried if she heard, by tonight, that at least the passport side of it had been cleared up, for her and Timothy."

Loveday was really in as sensitive a state as even Martin could have wished, had he known; so that now his allusion, well rubbed in, to the heartless turmoil she caused in other people's affairs, brought an inward wince—and outwardly a childish scowl of dislike for the officious youth. Then she turned her back on him, and said confidentially to Stefan: "You *are* the only nice one here! They're all so cross with me, and I don't care a bit. What ought I to do? I *don't* care, you know." She was very anxious that he should be convinced on this point.

He smiled at her. "Seven years ago, and just at this time of the year and at this hour of the day, I was in quite bad trouble indeed; and today, you see, it does not matter. Try and think like that."

"What was the trouble?" Loveday asked. "As bad as mine, now?"

"I had been sentenced to death, and they came and fetched me from my cell. That was not really bad, you see, because it was to have been over soon. It was just to walk down the prison corridor while the man walked behind me with a loaded revolver at my head. Only not to know at which moment he would fire, that was uncomfortable!"

Loveday shuddered. Chernov was so matter-of-fact, comparing those ghastly moments walking down the corridor with her pitiful little scrape.

"But you're not dead; you're here!" she cried.

"They were only trying to frighten me; it was done for fun, you see. Actually they dared not shoot me then, not until

my Cossacks should have forgotten. In two, three years perhaps, very quietly. But meanwhile I escaped."

—"Loveday!" Mab's high clear voice cut across what Chernov was saying. "You and I are going to take out our lunch, somewhere up in the hills. We needn't be back all day. Shall we start at once?"

Loveday faced round, acutely suspicious. At any normal time she would have welcomed such a plan; or, at any rate, nonchalantly accepted it. But—why just today? Were the others trying to hustle her out of the way? Out of whose way? She refused to be punished like a naughty little schoolgirl, however much she might accuse herself of wrongdoing!"

"It's too hot," she objected. "I'd rather stop in the garden till later, when it's cool enough to bathe."

Judith and Timothy exchanged glances.

"Oh, I'm on to it," Loveday remarked, coldly. "It's because of Beechy. Sorry. I'll go home to Mummy. Anyhow, she sent for me."

"My dear, I don't think you'd better go until I've fixed up this passport business. You ought to wait and see what happens. I'll probably be back by tea-time. But, to put it quite honestly and without beating about, it's not quite fair on Beatrice that she should have to stop up in her room all day."

"And she can't bear the prospect of coming face to face with me? All right. I don't care. I'll skulk. I'm quite willing to skulk." Loveday got up from the table and slung herself into the big arm-chair, her long, slim legs dangling over the arm, her face turned away from the company, a very picture of mutiny and petulance. . . .

Stefan murmured to Mab: "She is delicious. A little Tanagra, but modern."

Meanwhile Loveday, unconsoled by any knowledge that she could be found fascinating in adversity, was thinking: "Hell! What *can* I have done, last night? . . . They wouldn't all be hating me so if I hadn't been much worse than

just over-excited. But how quee, not to know for the rest of your life about that one lost hour. They all know, and I don't; and it concerns me most. Stefan's the only decent one, but he *will* talk about Death in Russia when one asks him a sensible question. The House of the Seven used to be paradise, but now . . . All my own fault! I don't wonder they want to strangle me. Strangle or slap me. I know what I'll do. I'll write an adorable letter to Mummy, a really good one crammed with love, telling her how I'm longing to be back. I am, for the moment, so I'd better write it quick, so that I can be truthful, in case I change my mind. Darling Lamb-Bird, and so displeased! What a beast I was to rush off like that! What a beast I always am! And now I suppose Beechy'll go and make me a co-respondent; just what Mummy's always been afraid of. And I'll have to get up in court and say: 'M'lud, I can't account for one hour of my blameless career, because, alas, I was intoxicated!' or shall I say 'inebriated'? Which would sound better in court? Intoxicated—inebriated. Intoxicated—inebriated. I'm not sure that I don't prefer simply 'drunk,' best of all. Not so pompous. If it gets into the papers, and it's sure to, a luscious case like that, Charles will read about it. . . ."

Deep down among her dishevelled thoughts lay the reproach: "If Charles were here to look after me, if Charles hadn't failed me—oh, I shouldn't ever do these things. Why isn't he here always, to look after me? . . ."

CHAPTER V

SI VIEILLESSE SAVAIT!

"IF I rush at it and get it over, and don't hang about," thought Loveday, on the stairs that led to her mother's flat at Porto Rinaldo, "that's the only way I can do it." By a miracle, she had not lost her key during the eight days she had been away at Lagnello. Softly she unlocked the front door, and stood for an instant in the hall.

Laura Trevelyan was in the sitting-room, by the open window. She had seen Loveday's cab drive up; she had heard Loveday's step on the stairs of the hall; she had not moved; her body was upright and rigid, and stared out towards the sea and the low hills, away from the fugitive daughter. But above her hung the feeling of tears.

Loveday rushed across the room; impulsively flung her arms round her mother. As she had anticipated, this was hard to do, but what followed was easy. . . . Mummy looked so dreadfully alone, just sitting there, with no occupation!

"Mummy! Oh, Mummy darling, do forgive me. I was such a beast to go. I *am* so glad to be back again, with you."

Laura Trevelyan succeeded in holding aloof from the fervent clasp of Loveday's arms; she was stone in a bracelet of warm life—until Loveday's last two words. And those broke down her resistance, for there was no doubt but that the child was sincere. "I *am* glad to be back again—with you!" They embraced and kissed one another, not caring how foolish they might be, and not really caring who had done wrong, or which of them needed to be forgiven.

"Oh, Mummy," half sobbed Loveday, "you're all nice and bosomy again!" It was good to be fondled as though she were still a baby; as though there had never been any scrapes, and no one had ever been angry.

"You won't run away again, Loveday?"

"No, Mummy, no. Have you been very lonely?" She said it quickly, so that Mummy should not use the word herself. It was a word that Loveday dreaded when her mother used it. . . . And, truth to tell, Laura Trevelyan did not always employ it quite scrupulously nor in fair combat. Loveday found that it robbed the word of its worst pang when she spoke it first, herself. "Have you been dreadfully lonely, Mummy? You haven't been ill? You've seen lots of people?" It seemed to her now a more poignant desertion that she should have left her mother alone like this for a week, than for the whole of her eight months in the autumn and winter.

Mrs. Trevelyan had a short battle with herself. She *had* been ill, and might so easily admit it, and thus gain even more of this glorious heartening outpour of affection and remorse—life-giving stuff to Laura Trevelyan, who belonged to a sentimental age. But she would not be greedy; she knew how direly it would upset her daughter. She would not be greedy. She said she had not been ill, only unhappy.

"Didn't anybody come and see you? Beasts!" cried Loveday, stroking her mother's hand; nuzzling her like a young pony.

"Plenty of visitors," said Mrs. Trevelyan, but scornful of their claims. "Dreadful bores, all of them: Colonel Davenport, and Signora Strada; oh, and Princess Zommlohe, once. I'd much rather talk to you, Loveday, than any of them. We don't want anybody else, do we?"

"Mummy," whispered Loveday. She felt so comforted, so safe. Belonging did count, after all. And nobody was as human as Mummy, when it came to it.

"Did you have a good time, sweetheart, at—at Lagnello?" Mrs. Trevelyan asked, determined to be noble.

"Not very; not as much fun as usual."

Mrs. Trevelyan sighed with relief. All this was almost too wonderful to be true.

Mother and daughter vied with each other in generous conciliation; and now it was the mother's turn: "We must

ask Judith Maitland to come over and stay with us for a few days. She's always been very hospitable to you, dear. I am afraid I was rude to her," faltered Laura. "It was unfortunate, her coming just when she did. All this business with the lawyers . . . and after nursing poor Augusta. . . . My nerves were in such a state!" Then, honestly shedding excuses: "And I hated her coming to take you away from me."

"But she couldn't really, Mummy. Not *really*. Of course, I love being with Judith; I can't help that being true; but there's enough to go round, Mummy. If I simply adore you—and I do—you can't possibly want the same as she gets."

"But I do!" cried poor Mrs. Trevelyan, unburdening herself after many years. "I feel, for instance, that you tell Judith all about it whenever you get into trouble, or do something you shouldn't; as though she were a young girl herself, and I had never been one. Leaving me out, just because I'm your mother. But I'm not so very much older than Judith, and I can remember quite well—I dare say as well as she can—all the mad things I used to do, and how I felt about them. And so, you see, I could sympathize if you gave me a chance, Loveday."

"Really, Mummy? *Mad* things? . . ." And a submerged voice, deep down in Loveday's conscience, whispered: "Passport!"

Laura Trevelyan was smiling and dimpling and looking very reminiscent. . . .

"Did you ever," Loveday began, turning her head so that only the fruit-like curve of one cheek was visible, "did you ever, Mummy, do something too awful for words, that your people didn't know about and ought never to have? And you trusted to luck, thinking that you could keep it all hushed up, and then everything went wrong, and your plans burst and scattered as though they had been a parcel badly tied up in thin paper—the way I tie parcels, Mummy?"

"Oh, dear me, yes! Dear me, poor Sophie! That was a dreadful affair!" She debated silently as to whether she should go on and confide to Loveday this half-forgotten scrape of

her girlhood. To be sure, the moral was all wrong; for pretty Laura Curtis, at eighteen, had wickedly deceived her parents. But somehow, in this new region of intimacy with her daughter, Laura divined that Loveday would not be unchivalrous; would not take advantage of such a confession. And it was so sweet to be sitting here by the window in the half-light, gossiping as though they were companions of the same age; as though she were Judith—even, perhaps, as though she were better than Judith.

Loveday, sitting on the rug, stirred, and flung out one arm across her mother's knees. She turned her face upward, waiting for the story.

. . . "It was very wrong indeed of me, Loveday. But he was so attractive. Quite the most spruce young officer in his regiment. And, although, as they were stationed so near, my father usually allowed me to dance with the nicest of the junior officers, he took a dislike to this special one—my father was sometimes unreasonable—and said that I was not to know him; not to speak nor to bow; and certainly not to allow him to pay me any little attention. He didn't tell me why; and I must say, though we were trained to obedience, that I thought he was being harsh. You know, Loveday, I was supposed to be quite a belle in my time, and so perhaps I was a little bit spoilt. Anyhow, when my great friends, the Winters—you've heard me speak of Sophie Winter?—arranged this picnic, just for the young folk, and I heard that he was to be of the party—"

"What was his name, Mummy?"

But Laura Trevelyan could not at first remember it; then it came back to her: "Charles—" Loveday started, and a thrill ran through her! "Yes, his name was Charles. But his surname— Dear me, it has quite slipped away."

"Go on, Mummy; don't stop. You went, of course, to the picnic. I do hope he tried to seduce you!"

"*Loveday!*"

"Sorry, Mummy!" murmured Loveday, plaintively, and settled down again. "How *do* I think of these things?"

"I'm sure I don't know," severely; but the scent of girlhood was in Laura's nostrils, and she would not stop her tale to scold Loveday, now.

She told how she had battled with her conscience, and finally decided to go to the picnic, even though her parents had forbidden her to accept any invitation where she might conceivably meet Charles. Charles had ogled her once or twice, languorously. "He was fair, with a heavy, golden moustache, and lazy, wicked eyes—"

"Oh!" cried Loveday.

"—And always smart as paint!" added Laura Trevelyan. So she persuaded the Curtis parents to allow her to spend a few days at the house of her friend Sophie; and they said "yes" without suspicion. "And is there a special reason, my dear Laura?" "A picnic, perhaps." "Indeed, how nice. And how are you going?" "Oh, in a wagonette," quickly.

"—*That* wasn't deceiving them," Laura related, "because I had no idea that we should do otherwise. But Sophie and her brothers, one of them especially, were considered a tiny bit fast!" Trained by Loveday, and most of all by the spirit of the twentieth century, Laura Trevelyan had slipped out of the habit of using obsolete phrases; but they returned again now, quite naturally, to give flavour to her narrative. She described with relish exactly what she had worn for the picnic: her cream delaine, sprigged with corn-flowers; and the polonaise in the same blue draped her hips. Dresses, then, were worn tight to the shoulder and bust; "Not like now, when, really, there are no figures worth speaking of to wear them to! I was supposed to have a nice figure, when I was eighteen. Plump, of course, but that was the fashion. I had a complexion, and that counted, too."

"And your hair, Mummy? What did hair do with itself then? A curl over your shoulder? How too sweet!"

But her mother looked a trifle offended. "*That* old-fashioned style? Do you take me for your grandmother? No, we wore our hair cut very short behind—shorter than your modern shingle, if anything. And a thick curled fringe in front. It

suited me very well indeed like that, everybody said; in fact, they said the style might have been made for me. I don't like the sort of compliments you get nowadays from your admirers, Loveday. It sounds so often as if they did not admire you at all, but quite the reverse!"

"You mean when they call me devil and things?"

"Devil, indeed!—'You're like a flower yourself, and your lovely hair is the corn,' Harry Winter said to me, when I came down, ready to start, on that fatal day. Dear me, that *was* a pretty frock! Blue bows all down the front and bodice and skirt. . . ."

—And soon Loveday was rejoicing in the completed picture of a demure Laura, covered neatly and becomingly from the flow of her skirts to her only nakedness, which was between the pinked edges of her lavender gloves and her tightly fitting sleeves, where they did not quite meet. Above her blushing pink and white face was a pork-pie hat in Dunstable straw.

Delicious Mummy! Imagine her, then, dropping her parasol from fright and joyful surprise when she discovered—probably just after Harry Winter's orthodox compliment had called out her dimples—that they were not to go in a wagonette, after all, as she had surmised; but in high dogcarts, two of the party in each.

Loveday felt that this sounded infinitely more dashing than any escapade of the motor-car and aeroplane period. She could visualize the bunch of pretty girls, pale pink and blue and primrose, some of them trembling a little, some coy and playful, being gallantly helped up to the high seats; a reckless young officer springing up beside his chosen partner; gathering the reins, cracking the whip. . . .

"And you, Mummy? Of course you went with—with Charles? Was he a captain? Do hurry up! How did it all come out?" For her mother was looking indescribably demure and coquettish.

"I was with him going, and I must say that he behaved beautifully; like a gentleman. That was partly, I think, be-

cause he was a little bit nervous about the pony. He said the animal was too fresh; it took up most of his attention. I am glad to say that we arrived without any mishaps. Then, going back—" she paused, dramatically.

"*Now* the quee part's coming—" whispered Loveday to herself.

"—Going back, we changed our seats. He, Charles, took Sophie Winter."

"Oh, Mummy!" a cry of disappointment. "What a beast! So, then, he never sed—he never kissed you, after all?"

Mrs. Trevelyan looked virtuous. "I may thank my stars that it did happen like that, Loveday. For—what do you think?—his pony bolted on the way back, and I heard afterwards from Sophie just why: he had put his arm round her for a kiss, and of course she struggled. But the pony felt—"

"Felt what was happening, and the shock made him bolt? Oh, Mummy, I didn't know a pony could be such a puritan one!"

Laura Trevelyan laughed indulgently at Loveday's nonsense, but explained that she had meant to refer to the slackening of the hand on the reins "—And there was the most dreadful accident, and that poor girl—" impressively—"my poor friend, Sophie, was thrown out, and twisted her ankle and was all cut about the face; you could see the scar for weeks afterwards. So after that, of course, there was no hushing it up."

"Hushing what up?" asked Loveday, puzzled.

"Why, that we had been to the picnic in dogcarts, two and two, and that Lieutenant—that Charles had been of the party."

"But, Mummy, that isn't *all* the scrape, is it? That isn't *all* that happened to you?"

"My parents were exceedingly angry with me. Heavens, yes. How I was lectured and punished, and had to promise never to do it again, and how I cried!"

"But it wasn't even you that he was trying to kiss. He behaved beautifully with you; you said so!"

And suddenly Loveday recognized what a perfectly adorable little scrape this was, of her mother's girlhood; she visualized it with all its touching details, its futility, its anti-climax, its bewildering lack of any real guilt to stain the pale pink and blue. And poor darling Lamb-Bird was so delighted with it all, prinking and bridling; sure that by her confession of this secret scarlet she had entered on to the very territory where her own daughter dwelt, and that now there need never again be reticence between them.

. . . A queer slow, thrilling desire stole over Loveday, to make things between them be as her mother hoped, in this intimate hour of enchantment. After all, was there any reason except an artificial one, surely artificial, that they were mother and daughter, to prevent their being friends? If she told Mummy all about her own scrape, not many degrees worse, accepting that times had changed, and standards, would she not by her confession make Mummy the happiest woman in the world? And as she herself had understood Mummy's outlook and way of doing things, why should not her mother understand hers? "*What* an adventure, to break down the barriers, a sort of pioneer," thought Loveday! Perhaps millions of mothers and daughters, following after in couples, would bless her for it. No more fuss, hiding things; and beastly little rows; and then rushing off to tell one's friend who had had the same beastly little rows with *her* mother! And besides, it would be nice to confess to Mummy, and be shriven. Mummy had been left—lonely. All Loveday's fault! Loveday owed her atonement; not just being there in the flesh, but an honest sharing up of what was in her mind, too. How glorious to have this power! Making a gesture, like a warrior who says to his unarmed foe: "Here's a naked sword, take it!"—trusting him. "It's much braver to trust than to fight," thought Loveday. Though, of course, Mummy wasn't a foeman, and it was all right. . . .

"Mummy, may I tell you something? It's a hell of a mess, but you said I needn't keep things from you; and that you'd understand."

"Of course, darling," deeply gratified.

So Loveday began.

She did not begin at the beginning, because there was no beginning. So her narrative started at all points, without a junction; cross-lines running into angles and stars, and that gradually jig-sawed into a vast, horrifying Futurist pattern:

. . . There was her attempted flight to England with Timothy Somerset, not because she liked him, but because she *had* to use his passport; and from there she naturally sprang back to the burning of her own passport because it had Hungarian visas on it. "And I'll tell you about *that* presently, Mummy; only wait a minute!"—For after all, she had to get to England, and it wasn't because of Timothy, really it wasn't; "You can't go by what things look like, Mummy. For instance, Stefan, when we got back that night—" for—yes, yes, they *had* been turned back, and that was why Loveday had not returned at once to Porto Rinaldo when Mummy's telegram arrived, because she had to wait until Judith hauled her out of the mess with the authorities. "And Stefan Chernov was so kind! . . . No, no, no, Mummy, not him, either. . . ! And everyone was just mad and silly and thought it quite fun." Champagne—that was it. Too much champagne. "No, I don't —not often! But I got into the way of it in London when I was tearing about. And I've not told you that part yet. *That* was after I left Freya's studio—" Here a swift brilliant account of her freebooter adventures in London, after the quarrel with Freya and before she met Charles. . . . Charles. . . . "Isn't it quee, Mummy, the same name! That's why I jumped so, though of course it's quite a common name. And that's why I had to get to London even without a passport, because I heard that his mother was getting married again. . . ." Here she even forgot that she had a listener, so absorbed was she in her narrative.

. . . Loveday talked on and on, oblivious; living again her ghastly fortnight in hell, in Petal's flat. The horror became so real that her escape with von Tadelheim followed inevitably. When she had started her chronicle of adventure, Love-

day was consciously making it a point of honour to be wholly honest; to re-edit no experience; to leave out not one of her crimes, big or little; for she was giving her mother and herself a chance to re-establish their life together—a great chance, so it seemed to her; and it would not be fair to spoil it with prevarications and bits of lies patched on to a clean spread of truth. She was still inspired with the idea that had fallen on her like the blessing of rain after drought, that all the trouble and confusion that had existed between her and her mother, loving each other as they did, was only because, hitherto, she had never had enough courage. She had either told her mother nothing about herself, and scraped through on evasions and good acting; or she had tossed fragments of confessions here and there, and been furious and resentful that they had not been understood. But—she was part of her mother; born of her, as flowers are born from the brown earth. Surely, then, the earth was kindly to her flowers, whatever ill befell them? Whatever winds had blown them?

But directly Loveday spoke of Charles, though instinctively she felt more akin than ever to her mother, because she was suffering more deeply, yet outwardly she was not aware, any more, of a listener. . . .

Out to Budapest . . . von Tadelheim's break-down and ungentlemanly behaviour. . . . The sudden generosity of little Pinkie, and so back again to London and Charles. Charles had been so wonderful. But then she had shown him the silver coat, and all the radiant world collapsed into dust and grit. And Petal arrived with her protection and her tact and hospitality, and Hell opened again. . . . Dark circles of the Netherworld. . . . "And so that's why, Mummy, I dashed out to you." She was rushing wildly up the circles again; spiralling into the daylight. . . . "And that's why I burned the passport, when you asked me for it to go to Nice, so that you shouldn't see where I had been in the meanwhile. And that's why I had to get back to Charles when I heard Petal was marrying, and so I risked it on Timothy's passport, and we got caught and sent back. But at any rate that's

been put right now; Judith saw the *Questore* yesterday. And I don't think there's anything more, except—except—oh, Mummy, if you *could* let me go back to England now—now that you understand I *must* see him to be happy again. . . ." Up and up, and . . . here she was, surely safe, with her mother again, and speaking the truth. Clear sunshine everywhere. . . .

Then, at last, she looked up, her cheeks wet with tears, though she had not noticed that she had been crying. And—

"*Mummy!*" cried Loveday, aghast at what she saw.

She sprang from her half-kneeling, half-sitting position on the rug. It would be easier to receive the shock standing. "*Mummy!*"

Laura Trevelyan could never find the pomp and pageantry of eloquence, to express her tragedies. She fumbled . . . and brought forth only little cross words, like slaps. Though she had blenched and blenched at Loveday's revelations, though her credulity felt like a gaping cave, and belief was clenched against every new testimony of a young girl's netherworld . . . though she was sick, giddy, at her first glimpse over the edge, watching it flaming and spinning as today it flamed and span, yet all that she found to say gathered itself into one preposterously inadequate exclamation: "*Disgusting!*—How dare you?—*My* daughter!"

But it was enough; it showed Loveday that she had been a fool, and worse than a fool. The dream was dead. A mother and daughter could not be friends; they could only be eternally mother and daughter . . . when Laura Trevelyan was the mother.

"I've brought it down on myself, with a vengeance!" thought Loveday. Every strip of armour, every shield of concealment that she had ever possessed, she had voluntarily thrown away. Here and now she stood exposed—all that was sacred and sensitive exposed for Mummy's hail-stones.

Mrs. Trevelyan sat rigidly upright; her face was moist and red, her round blue eyes hard as pebbles. "I wish I had died when your father died. You've always been a trouble

to me, always. You've always been ungrateful. I ought to have had sons, not daughters. Like that young man you spoke about, who adores his mother. Quite right and proper that he should. But you, you haven't the sense of a fly. You *would* try to come between mother and son, and no girl could make a worse blunder. That's how they always lose the best men, and you've lost him; and serve you right!"

"I wouldn't have!" cried Loveday, passionately. "Oh, God, you haven't understood! If he had been devoted to his mother —but he wasn't, he wasn't, I tell you; he was pretending; he was on some lay of his own; and that was the hell of it, to grope about and not know why! I shouldn't have cared a damn if it had been real and honest and natural."

"Yes, you would. You're jealous. You've always been jealous. Why shouldn't it be natural for a boy to love his mother? If you'd loved your mother half as much— And then all that silliness about the flat. I tell you, Loveday, if I'd known what was going on when you kept me in ignorance, telling me all sorts of lies, and often didn't write, but if I'd known, the only fortnight of that time when I would have been easy about you was when you were staying with that nice woman, Mrs. Soper, in really decent surroundings. Yes, you may laugh. I expect she tried to look after you and keep you from flying round and getting yourself a bad name. And what Mrs. Soper must have thought of your mother, finding you living that sort of life! . . . Disgraceful! But you wouldn't think of that. I see nothing to laugh at."

"Nor do I," said Loveday; but she went on laughing.

"And now, all Porto Rinaldo will hear that I have a husband in England and I don't look after him, if my own daughter says so to a lot of officials she doesn't know. What right have you to mention me at all?"

"I didn't," wearily.

"Of course you did. You couldn't find a dying father without having a mother who wasn't looking after him, could you?" which, in its way, was logic. "And all those terrible goings-on in England; dashing about with men in cars at

night; drinking too many cocktails; being seen at night-clubs; it makes me grow cold when I try to imagine what it might have led to."

"Mummy, it wouldn't." Loveday was pleading, now, in a lost cause, but she tried to rally her eloquence once more; tried once more to pull her mother beyond her mother's own finite limits. "Mummy, I can see that it was all frightening to girls, long ago, that sort of thing, because they didn't know what they were going into or what might happen; but now—that bogey, it's obsolete; it's quite easy to cope with seductions and roués and rakes and all the rubbish-heap. Mummy, it isn't: 'You never know what it might lead to'; we *do* know what it might lead to, but we just see to it that it doesn't. We say: 'No, I don't want to!'—That's why it was really all right, my Hungary stunt. I had my eye on Fritzie all the time, and when I saw signs that he was beginning to hover, and might settle at any moment—"

"*Disgusting!*" said Mrs. Trevelyan.

Loveday shrugged her shoulders. "Never again," she thought. "Oh, never again with Mummy. But God, what's the good of that now?—Now that I've told her everything?"

. . . Another dead man!

CHAPTER VI

CAFARD

ALTHOUGH it did not take Loveday half an hour to confess to her mother the full history of her wrongdoings, it took Mrs. Trevelyan several days to absorb it. . . . Bit by bit she recovered from her stunned condition; bit by bit occurred to her the full and rich possibilities; the consequences, the contemporary gossip, the probable effect on Loveday's future, the effect on her own future. Her pent-up agitation burst forth again in bright tints of anger. She was, indeed, too angry to be despondent. This was a row on a scale that Loveday had never experienced before. Nothing that Loveday could say or do but led back to the inevitable reminder. Her freedom was lopped in a hundred different directions; "For I see that I can't trust my daughter. . . ."

Laura Trevelyan had leisure, now, to become ill, as a result of shock from what she had heard. She became ill often—several times a day. She kept Loveday short of money . . . but the girl was resigned to that stale old hell. She asked vigilant questions about Loveday's most trivial plan or movement, and then disbelieved the answers. "After all, if you can lie to your mother once . . ."

"I do wish you wouldn't talk of yourself in the third person," Loveday flared out, irritably. It was scratching on her nerves, Mrs. Trevelyan's habit of saying reproachfully, for instance: "I should have thought you would be glad to be with your mother on her birthday!" instead of: "with me on my birthday." A sort of complacent sanctifying of herself. Loveday had not noticed it, or only with amusement, until now, when they were boxed up together, the two of them, in the long hot days of summer in Porto Rinaldo, with very

little relief from outside; for all the English visitors had gone away again, back to England. Even the residents did not usually stay after the end of June, but went into the mountains for fresher air. But the Trevelyans could not afford it. They were very hard up this year; and in September they would have to go back to England, anyhow, for the hearing of the case about Augusta Penrhu's Will.

There were a few Italian residents left; but, indeed, for once Mrs. Trevelyan had not anticipated falsely, in prophesying that dire rumours would spread as a result of Loveday's assertion to the authorities that she had tried to go back to England because her daddy was dying and had no one to look after him. This had leaked out. Some people believed it; some did not. But a cloud of murkiness obscured the clear black edge of Mrs. Trevelyan's widowhood: "The daughter said that her father was still alive. . . . Strange. . . . Of course, she may have been lying, but. . . ." But respectability hoped for the worst; hoped that for some lurid reason Mrs. Trevelyan could not live with Mr. Trevelyan; or, better still, that Mr. Trevelyan could not live with Mrs. Trevelyan. An occasional drift of this, passing under Mrs. Trevelyan's nose, did not make her temper any sweeter, nor any less virulent her wrath against Loveday. At a more light-hearted period Loveday would have chuckled most inhumanly at this merry result of her lying; and would have confided it to an amused kindred spirit. But now and here were no kindred spirits, nor was she in a mood to chuckle at anything. Outwardly silent and apathetic, her mouth coldly curved, her eyelids drooping, her small ash-gold head proudly lifted, she gave a picture to the world, and to her mother, of a disdainful chilly creature, too bored to live. Inwardly she was most profoundly sad. Her mother had failed her. She did not mind very much the perpetual scoldings, the unchivalrous pouncings on this and that bye-issue of her story, previously missed. What she minded so dreadfully was the initial snub, that ghastly snub, on which had perished her dream of being the first daughter in the world to be really

honest with the first mother. Honest, and happy for ever afterwards. . . .

Was there ever such a fool? After twenty-one years of Mummy, actually to imagine, even for one flame-hued intoxicated moment of sweetness, of power, that Mummy would be equal to understanding and accepting just the story of a modern girl's life, without the deft twists and turns and embroidery that made it suitable for mothers! "And I hoped she'd never need to be lonely again, if I told her," reflected Loveday. "But she's lonelier than ever, and so am I." God! What a mess-up!

After a few weeks with Loveday on these terms: indignant tyranny on the one side, and a listless lack of response on the other, Mrs. Trevelyan began to wish for reconciliation. She decided that Loveday had been punished enough—well, nearly punished enough!—though of course in the future she was going to be far more strict with her only daughter. The child had turned out so pretty and popular; and her mother, loving her too much, had spoilt her; that was it, spoilt her! "I ought never to have left her alone in London. I ought to have thought more about the temptations." She had, of course, thought quite enough about the temptations, but about the wrong ones, as Loveday herself had frequently said.

But even now, even after Loveday's staggering descriptions, Laura Trevelyan rejected the offer of new hells for old. Where her mind had been violently torn open, it closed up again. And she still summed up her daughter's entire experience in terms of von Tadelheim. . . .

—"And now Mummy's forgiven you," Laura longed to say, remembering, forlornly, the one happy hour of Loveday's return to her; yearning for that glamour all over again; wishing it could have remained tranced and motionless, for ever like that—she and Loveday together.

So, on the hottest day they had yet suffered, when the sea and the coast were locked in supreme siesta, and when she ought to have been lying on her bed, behind cool jalousies and mosquito-nets, resting, after lunch, Mrs. Trevelyan

trotted down into the town. She bought meringues for tea, because Loveday liked them. Meringues filled with cream, squashy and sticky; an awkward parcel to carry back through the heat and dust at three o'clock at the end of July in Italy. But she did so want to be friends again; and restore to her flat the old Loveday who chattered and romped, and talked amusing nonsense, and dashed about, and was troublesome and delicious; in place of this tall mute presence who did not much care what she did, and would hardly answer a question, or respond to a scolding; who could not even rouse herself to be disobedient. Laura Trevelyan was a little afraid. But Loveday had always liked meringues; they had been a great treat, for nursery tea. Though by the time she did eventually get them home, a fluid sticky mess, and disentangled them, and put them on the tea-table as a surprise, she was so cross and tired that any possible reconciliation was spoilt in advance.

"No, thanks," said Loveday, barely glancing at them, and then glancing away again.

Laura Trevelyan sat bolt upright, her blue eyes popping. "Loveday, those are meringues!"

"Who'd have thought it!" murmured Loveday.

"Your favourites. . . . You always liked them better than anything for tea."

"I'm not hungry."

Her mother exploded: "You're just a mass of capriciousness; one moment one thing, and another moment another. You let your mother go all the way down to town in this stewing weather—"

"Oh, Mummy," protested Loveday, wearily, "what a damn silly thing to do!"

" . . . Then you use language at me for it, and I toil and toil and take all that trouble in trying to please you and give you a little surprise, and squander money when we are not well off, and all that's your fault, too. Look at that premium you wasted, wilfully. And then, when I hope for a little reward, all I get is 'I'm not hungry.' And the cream

will be sour by tomorrow; you can't expect meringues to keep in this weather, or do you?"

"No," barely dropped from Loveday's lips. "Don't expect anything."

. . . Mrs. Trevelyan went away to her bedroom, and cried. The heat had upset her, and the disappointment; but she said that it was all the disappointment. She had one of her "attacks": pain and faintness and heart and general disorder of soul and body, needing to be laved and tended. She said: "I've sacrificed my whole life to my Only Daughter, and now she doesn't want me!"

Loveday mechanically contradicted her: "Oh, Mummy, of course I do." But there was a plaint of virtue about that phrase "my only daughter" that was thoroughly exasperating. "It isn't my fault; I wish you'd had twelve daughters!"

"And, pray, why?"

"Because then you'd have eleven left!"

Mrs. Trevelyan, believing that in this lay a threat to leave her, wept once more, and had another attack, and had to be laved and tended all over again; and repeated: "My only daughter!" but this time Loveday did not respond.

"I expect you're ready enough to talk when you're with your friend Judith," Mrs. Trevelyan went on, goading her; for she, too, was in a state of misery, but preferred quarrelling to silence—quarrelling which might lead eventually to Loveday's arms being pressed warmly round her, and Loveday's ardent voice reassuring her. So: "Your friend Judith has a daughter, too, and I hope one day she may find out how little good a daughter is to her, and that they're not worth all the trouble and sacrifice!"

Still no reply from Loveday, except a bottle of eau-de-Cologne, dumbly proffered.

"Judith has always been jealous of me," Laura went on, feverishly dabbing too much eau-de-Cologne on her forehead, so that a drop rolled down into her eyes and stung them. "Agh! Water—quick! . . . Yes, always been jealous. She wanted you to herself, and couldn't bear my influence over you.

I was quite willing to be friends with Judith, if she didn't grudge me every moment that my daughter spent with her mother."

But Loveday was too broken and defeated even to dispute this amazing statement. "What does it matter?" she thought. "I've got to forget it, for now. I can't leave Mummy alone. If we win the case, and she has plenty more money, perhaps she can hire a companion woman to twine round her, and then I'll go off to America or somewhere, and be on my own. I suppose one can always make money if one works." The old days of piracy were over for her, she knew that. Charles had destroyed her will to loot. So she hung about now and waited till she might be freed. The sun blazed down upon the stale streets, and dried up the green grass of the hills; even the sea was lukewarm; in the flat were a great many flies.

Laura Trevelyan saw Loveday's spirits flag and wilt, but was baffled by her daughter's lack of resilience, not knowing how sorely she had hurt her. She made one more effort. On this occasion, she arrived home after a tea-party, looking prettily pink—pink, not a moist red—and with a conscious air about her that somehow would have reminded Loveday, had she been more observant just then, of when she had spoken about the dogcart and the dashing young officer and the cream delaine frock with blue corn-flowers. . . .

They sat at supper, as usual, in hopeless silence for a little while. And then Mrs. Trevelyan remarked, apropos of nothing: "I'm sure I never gave him the slightest encouragement."

"Who?" asked Loveday, in the monotonous fashion of one who does not care if a question is answered or not.

"Colonel Davenport."

"Oh, is he back?"

"He's just come down from the mountains, where he was shooting, I expect," chatted Mrs. Trevelyan. "On his way to England. He stopped for a day or two at Porto Rinaldo, entirely to see me and to put his question."

"His question? Has he only got one?"

"Only one that matters everything to him," Laura Trevelyan announced, dramatically.

Loveday was drumming with her fingers on the table-cloth, and gazing abstractedly out of the window at a ship.

"Your manners are abominable!" burst forth Mrs. Trevelyan, exasperated at being thwarted of her cues. "Lolling and lounging, and— Can't you sit upright and take an intelligent interest?"

Loveday sat upright, and took no interest whatever.

"—So I told him quite firmly, but as nicely as I could: 'No, no, Colonel Davenport, no—' But then he interrupted, and begged me to call him Charles—"

"God!" cried Loveday. "Is *his* name Charles, too?"

"I really see no reason why it shouldn't be? A very good name; one of my uncles was called Charles; the one who collected signet-rings and left it to the nation. I didn't want to hurt his feelings, so I said: 'No, no, Charles. I'm very honoured indeed, but I'm going to devote my life to my only daughter'—"

A tremor of animation began to show in Loveday: "Did he actually propose to you? That old bore?"

"That old bore" was really Mrs. Trevelyan's own mental description of her suitor, but she was not going to allow it from Loveday. "Colonel Davenport is an exceedingly well-informed man, of good family, and a record in the war—in all the wars—that he needn't blush for. It's certainly not for you to criticise him, Loveday!"

"But *did* he propose to you, Mummy?"

Her mother softened a little, and described the scene. Apparently, he had been present at the tea-party; had asked to see her home; and had taken her into Bartolozzi's for an iced drink. Then, leaning over a little marble-topped table, he had begged her to marry him.

"And you refused him?" Loveday could have cried with disappointment. What a way out, from her eternal responsibility. What an escape from bondage and perplexity! Mummy provided for; cherished; someone to run about and look after

her when she had an "attack." What did it matter that Colonel Davenport was undoubtedly, not only the worst and most persistent bore in Porto Rinaldo, but the most persistent bore that everybody who had met him, had ever met? He was, as her mother had said, a gentleman, kind, brave. . . .

"Why did you refuse him? Wasn't that rather a mistake? Couldn't you have doddled about a bit and told him that you were going to think it over?"

Laura Trevelyan had refused this offer of marriage, quite plainly, because she neither liked nor loved Colonel Davenport; not being greedy, she saw no other reason for accepting him. An hour of his droning was enough to drive her almost demented. But she preferred to think that in refusing him she had made a further sacrifice for Loveday's sake. So that now she called Loveday ungrateful . . . and reminded her that her own admirer, Mr. Charles Elvaston, had not, vulgarly speaking, come up to scratch—Mrs. Trevelyan did not put it like this, of course!—with anything like the eagerness of Colonel Davenport; had not, in fact, come up to scratch at all . . . which only proved that virtue was best, and not rushing about with men to the ends of the earth and getting yourself talked about. . . . No wonder he was disgusted. . . .

"Thanks," said Loveday, white-lipped.

And after that, reconciliation was hopeless. They just dragged on, all through August, and through half September.

But now the autumn was approaching; and the case of Augusta Penrhu's Will would soon be heard. Laura Trevelyan began to dream. . . .

"When I win my case," that was how it always began. . . . And all the rest was for Loveday. She would be able to afford, with that eight hundred a year of extra income, to give her daughter all that a young girl must be for ever coveting. And then Loveday would not want to leave her mother; she would be too happy, too occupied, too luxuriously surrounded. And whenever, in Loveday's speech, Mrs. Trevelyan seemed to detect an ominous threat of presently being left alone, then

she would comfort herself with secret plans of all that she was going to do for Loveday; all that she was going to buy for her. She shredded the dream into ever finer details, so that she remained busy and comforted.

A permanent home, for instance; how could you expect a daughter to stay with her mother when there is no home except a flat that has to be perpetually let, or else desolately unlet and empty of tenants? When she had won the case, Laura Trevelyan meant to live in London, in a small but charming house in a really nice neighbourhood. She thought of Phillimore Terrace, several times; there was a frangrance of old Kensington and green gardens about Phillimore Terrace; of dignity, too: dignity for the mother; fragrance for the daughter. Well . . . yes, here was the house, and here were two bright and airy rooms that were to be Loveday's bedroom and sitting-room, where she could entertain all her girl friends, undisturbed. Even her mother would always knock before going in; "Because I want her to feel that it is her own little private kingdom!"

. . . And a picture of herself standing outside a white-painted door, softly knocking, smiling at the sound of the eager, fresh young voices inside; Loveday's voice; Loveday talking, the others listening. And then a rush of feet to the door, and: "Oh! It's Mummy! Lamb-Bird, do come in!" "May I have tea with you, darling?" "Of *course,* Mummy. What a treat! Now you're going to be waited on just like a guest!" . . . Installed in the best arm-chair . . . such a dainty tea . . . And the girl friends—there were always two in the vision—saying: "Oh, Mrs. Trevelyan, we were just envying Loveday for having these lovely rooms of her own; we're so crowded, at home, and the whole family have to share the same sitting-room!" . . . Laura Trevelyan arranged it in her mind that all Loveday's girl friends should be rather crowded in their homes. And then, from Loveday: "Mayn't we tell them now, Mummy, about the ball?" And they smiled mysteriously and confidentially at each other, mother and daughter. . . .

The scene blurred and shifted into a ball-room; herself receiving the guests; Loveday, in a simple and distinguished frock, very much more expensive than any she had yet been able to afford, already dancing. "Dear Mrs. Trevelyan, what a success! Loveday looks too beautiful! I wonder if you would let me present her next May? There's something so unusual about her, and yet she's such good style!" . . . No one, in this dream-world, had ever been aware of gossip tarnishing the fair silver of Loveday's good name.

. . . More cronies gathering round to congratulate her. Not exactly chaperons; she knew that chaperons were out of date; but just happening to be there, so that they could say, further: ". . . And the orchestra, and the supper—everything so well arranged! Such a distinguished circle! And above all, dear Mrs. Trevelyan, so many men! . . ." The ball dwindled to a bunch of programmes, with little white pencils and little blue pencils tangled together by their cords. . . .

For the dreaming, taking the way of least resistance, after the habit of dreams, lapsed into phrases and ceremonies of forty years ago, when Laura was herself a girl. And then, inconsequently returned to a vision of twentieth-century girlhood, competent, steady-eyed gauntletted hands firm on the steering-wheel. . . . Loveday again.

But this was only after Laura Trevelyan had worsted Augusta in an argument. . . . No, no, no, of course not! Not Augusta! It could not be, because . . . poor Augusta's money was paying for it all; but somebody very like Augusta, who informed her, in a rather brisk and argumentative fashion, that she was spoiling Loveday in getting her, for her birthday, as a surprise, that smart little two-seater car, which she would be allowed to drive herself. But Mrs. Trevelyan answered serenely: "One must move with the times. Nowadays you can't expect a young girl . . . I give Loveday absolute freedom because I *know* I can trust her." "Well, that's very go-ahead of you, Laura. After all, how can you be sure that your daughter doesn't abuse the freedom you allow her?" "My dear, we're not a Victorian mother and daughter. Loveday

tells me everything; and even when she gets into a little scrape, we laugh together, she and I, and consult what had better be done. . . ."

—Ah, but it was sweet to be defending her broad-mindedness about Loveday against these hordes of stupid people who envied them their harmonious life together!

Money. . . . That was all they had lacked, so far. With money she could buy quantities of clothes for Loveday; white or flowerlike clothes, and all the expensive but perfect accessories. Of course Loveday would be invited to stay in nice country-houses, so she would need equipment for that, too. "How well that Trevelyan girl is turned out for every occasion, isn't she?" "Oh well, her mother sees to it, you know. Her mother has wonderful taste, and Loveday herself inherits it." "Are they rich?" "Not really rich, but comfortably off." . . . Tennis, yes, and there would be tennis at these house parties. Loveday, by this time, would be a good tennis-player.—Surely those lessons with patient Marietta Strada *must* have taught her something!

. . . No end to Laura Trevelyan's dream of clothes for Loveday; and an experienced maid to cope with them, because the child was really very untidy, and always had been—"Loveday's greatest fault is untidiness!" She did not mind admitting it, even in a dream, for it did not spoil anything. When she had won her case, she could afford well-trained and respectful servants who quietly and respectfully worked their fingers to the bone for the mistress' pretty young daughter; because, in their quiet and respectful way, they were proud of her.

Why not? Loveday was unique. No miracle like Loveday on all the fertile earth.

"When I win my case." . . . Meanwhile they lived coldly apart. But that would not last. You could bear an uncomfortable state of things when you knew that endurance was limited to a few months. So Laura Trevelyan was not as unhappy as Loveday, during that hot droning August in Porto Rinaldo.

"When I win my case," she thought.

And Loveday thought: "If she wins the case, I'll be able to get away—right away."

In early September Messrs. Gavin, Gray & Gavin wrote announcing the date when the validity of Augusta Penrhu's Will was to be contested in court. They also imparted the tidings that Sturton Hughes, the leading junior in probate work, who had been briefed to appear for the Trevelyans in the Trevelyan v. Penrhu case, had most regrettably been drowned while bathing, on his holiday in Wales. And that another barrister must be chosen instantly, to replace him. They suggested So-and-so, or So-and-so. And awaited Mrs. Trevelyan's instructions.

Thereupon illumination touched Laura with a vivid ray.

For nearly a week she walked about, metaphorically, on tiptoe, enigmatic, smiling. Then she could bear it no longer—she must tell her daughter.

"Loveday—come here, darling."

"Come where, Mummy?"

"Here. I've arranged a surprise for you—a wonderful surprise."

Loveday silently hoped it might not be meringues again.

Mrs. Trevelyan noticed how wan the girl was looking, and thought: "The heat. And not only that; she's fretting. . . . Well, her mother has put that right for her, now."

"What is the surprise, Mummy?"

"You know we had to brief a barrister to win our case for us? That's the expression they use: brief—brief a barrister."

"Yes, well?" listlessly. "I thought that was all settled."

"He's been drowned, Loveday. While bathing in Wales. Dreadfully careless. I've always begged you not to go out of your depth without a boatman. It must have been on a day when they forgot to deliver our *Continental Daily Mail*, or we should have seen it. Anyhow, our solicitors have had to engage —to *brief* another counsel. They wrote to me, and I wrote back. And *they* wrote back. If you took a little interest, Loveday, you'd have noticed the letters. But you never do. You're

too engrossed in yourself, always, to care about your mother's affairs. And yet I never forget to ask you who *your* letters are from?"

"Never," Loveday agreed. "I'm sorry about Sturton Hughes. Whom have we briefed, instead?"

Twinkles and beams from Mrs. Trevelyan. "Don't you remember telling me that Mr. Charles Elvaston was a barrister?"

Loveday stood—appalled.

PART FOUR: DEMETER'S DAUGHTER

CHAPTER I

THE VELVET BETRAYAL

CHARLES ELVASTON looked in at his chambers in the Temple directly he returned from a week's stalking in Scotland. It was about five o'clock on an afternoon of early October. In ten days' time, term would begin; and on October 14th the case of Augusta Penrhu's Will was to be heard. He had cursed very plentifully when the brief had been sent to him by Messrs. Gavin, Gray & Gavin; and for a few moments had been tempted to refuse it. Messrs. Gavin, Gray & Gavin would doubtless have been delighted if he had, for he did not specialize in Probate work, as had the late Sturton Hughes; Common Law was his own line. Messrs. Gavin, Gray & Gavin had conveyed to him politely that they were acting on special instructions from their clients in selecting him; but it was obvious that they, personally, considered the choice a mistake.

Loveday's choice, of course! . . . But what an odd thing for Loveday to have done. Hitherto her impudence, her unabashed lack of principle, had yet always been impelled by some saving spirit of grace: her knees did not bend; her impulses were never—propitiatory.

Though Charles was still angry with her for her behaviour last February, seven months ago, when she had flaunted her silver coat up and down his rooms, and then had rushed away to Italy, from Petal's flat, as madly as though pursued, yet now, on receiving the brief, his anger took a different twist. It was not like Debonair to try to re-establish their old intimacy by this sort of subterfuge. Couldn't she leave his job alone? He had all the male's usual impatience at allowing pleasure or emotion to filter through into this day's work, and mar it. Of course he would not refuse. That would be too much of a snub, as she had elected to seek him out again to

express—what was it?—her contrition? Or her forgiveness? He was not sure from what standpoint she viewed the whole matter. But they would be forced to a meeting, in this jumble of legal formalities and mothers and red tape, Gavins and Grays, dates and Wills and witnesses. . . . Surely she could not be such an ass as to endow him with some romantic halo in the matter? Their knight, their protector, fighting for their cause against the growling foe?—"*Oh Lord!*" groaned Charles, looking formidable, and feeling fastidious.

Still, he could not refuse. In whatever spirit she had appealed to him, it would be discourteous to refuse . . . and that was putting it mildly. He was too fond of Loveday, then? But that was putting it sentimentally.

He could not refuse, because he could not give her that insult to remember.

So Charles Elvaston shrugged his shoulders, and took his brief up with him to Scotland. At least, he was feeling extremely fit after his six weeks' cruise round Norway, in Ravenhill's yacht. No good losing your sense of values. He would try and win her case for her. They would meet gravely, perhaps; ceremoniously, and always in the presence of others; and then they would part again, and he would have the satisfaction of knowing that he had helped in a very minor way towards procuring for her, or for her mother—it was the same thing—an additional eight hundred a year to their present income. Then other briefs would come along—he was at that satisfactory stage of his career when he was always fairly busy—and he would forget Loveday. And other women would come along, and he would forget Loveday. He would have forgotten her already had she not won pre-eminence in his memory by her behaviour to Petal.

His clerk said now: "Mr. Gavin senior wanted you, Mr. Elvaston, sir; rang you up and asked me to ask you to ring him when you came back. I told him that you were expected this afternoon. Shall I get him now, sir?"

A few moments later and Charles had the pleasure of hearing from Mr. Gavin that Mrs. Trevelyan and her daughter

had arrived in London last week, and that they were at the disposal of their solicitors and counsel.

". . . Will you want more than the usual conference?"

"No," said Charles; "less."

"Eh? What? I didn't quite get you?"

"The usual conference will be enough, I think, Mr. Gavin."

The usual conference was the one which took place on the evening before the actual hearing of the case, when Charles would be bound to see Loveday and her mother; ask them questions concerning which he had doubts; and warn them more or less of the line which the counsel on the opposite side might be likely to take. There was no hope of escaping that one conference, but he dreaded it. Was Loveday dreading it, too? No— After all, she had pushed towards it. Or had she taken the initiative in her habitual whirlwind way, without the slightest idea of the embarrassing consequences? "I wonder how much her mother knows?" . . . And then Charles smiled, recollecting that *he*, at all events, knew a few quaint items about Mrs. Trevelyan! For all her loyalty, Loveday had not been able to prevent a vivid portrait of her mother pressing through her chatter, the winter before.

Mothers? . . . How ineffably different one mother could be from another! And he was going on now to visit Petal and Tom, just returned from their honeymoon. He had not seen them since their marriage, a couple of months ago. Charles heartily liked Tom Reid. None of that passionate resentment was his that sons are frequently supposed to feel towards a stepfather thrust upon them. Loveday would have reasserted that Petal made no mistakes; all that she did, whether directly or obliquely in relation to Charles, appeared only to her credit. He had no jealous wish to keep her to himself; all he desired for her—so Charles imagined—was the constant company of one who had a fine enough faculty to appreciate her.

Interpreted by Loveday, this would have been: "All he desires is another busy trumpeter, so that *he* may rest from

trumpeting, now and then; and yet be tranquilly assured that it's going on without him."

In her very choice of Tom Reid, Petal had given him every vindication of her generosity, her deep-seated bountiful nature, her tenderness, her gracious attitude of bending from a throne and gathering into her arms all those who were tired and broken and less fortunate, so that she might enrich them; and, for a final gift, lead them to believe that the enrichment had come, not from her, but from fortune, from laughing chance, from their own gallant efforts.

"*There* you are!" said Charles, in triumphant defiance; perhaps to the wraith of Loveday, that disturbing young breaker of images!

Tom Reid was not a youth, any more. He was a broken-down architect, of about fifty years. His friends said of him that he had had fine ideas, once; but that he had never done any good with them. He was, in fact, "poor old Tom!" grateful to accept whatever hack job came along, though unable to pour much of his old enthusiasm into it. "Poor old Tom" was a failure through certain inherent defects, mainly a fiery impatience, which, though fatal in an architect, might have made him a first-class martyr. He did sometimes talk, wistfully, of the houses he would have liked to design; but more often he sat silent, staring at them while they piled themselves into noble mansions inside his brain. . . .

"Castles in the air, Tom?"

"No, pink villas at Ealing, damn you!—'Mon Repos' and 'Sans Souci'!"

But how he longed for just those two fantastic dwellings, blended into one shining peace: the house where he might rest, and the house without sorrow! There was only one house for him where without sorrow he could rest. He longed to create it. It would not be startlingly original in design; but it would be his house; from the first brick to the last; nay, before the first brick: for the site would be chosen by him; the lines of it dreamt by him; the chimneys would stand clean and solid against the sky, as he always meant them to

stand. *His* house. . . . Ultimate perfection. . . . All his training and long hours of study, his early enthusiasms, should go into it, and render it pleasant; pleasant and kindly and dignified. And he thought, with passionate hatred, of the houses which were none of these things; flabby pretentious houses, where not one particle had any relation to the other; not wall with window, nor attic with drawing-room; and fools thought it did not matter that the front door was not rhythmically akin to the back door, because you never happened to see the two together and side by side! *Fools!* As though, in your brain, you did not *feel* the very personality of the house, and were caressed or jarred by it, according to the religion of the architect. But—and here was the final horror—not only had he seen houses designed without religion, but he had usually been unable to prevent them from being perpetrated by his own firm. They burned in his guilty memory, these numberless crimes. He tried to forget them, but he could not. Yet how was an unlucky man to live? As far as possible, he confined himself to the structural and business side of affairs —not very successfully. Yet occasionally, he had done what he could, by stealth, to mitigate the beastliness of his firm's productions; his surreptitious attempts at conversion were usually discovered and countermanded, but not quite always; which left him a little self-respect. "Some day!" he kept on promising himself. "Some day . . ." Meanwhile you had to obey your clients; you were cramped by alien orders; you were cramped by your boss who wanted to make money and did not care a damn for what he called, "Reid's artistic rubbish!"

—"What d'you want with an artistic house, for goodness' sake?" yapped the senior partner, over and over again, in the firm of Messrs. Wetherby, Bunting & Reid, Architects and Surveyors.

Reid, the afterthought of the firm, glowered back: "Good God! An *artistic* house!"

"Well, that's what I call it!" from Wetherby. "You'd send a good customer pelting away down the street as fast as

he could go. Our job is to build them the houses *they* want, not the houses *we* want; and to build 'em cheap."

Yet Reid stayed with them for nine years. Nine years of petty misery: patching up whatever stood; improving a fireplace; rebuilding an old wall; underpinning foundation. Patching!

He did not look like a tragedy. A round little man with a round wind-bitten face, rather like one of Dickens' more chirrupy characters; not in the least hollow or romantically lean. It needed Petal, Charles reflected, to discover with her delicate finger-tips, that could probe without ever doing hurt, that under the cheerful surface Reid was a man who had almost lost hope.

Within an hour of her first accidental meeting with him she knew all about the house that he had never built. Now he was going to build it for her. They were going to live in it, man and wife. "Isn't Petal wonderful?" said her friends. "She might have married almost anyone; but she prefers to do this. Of course, poor fellow, he worships her. She's so wonderful that she actually makes him believe that *he's* giving *her* this house—somewhere in Dorset, isn't it?—as a sort of present, though of course it's the other way round. Yes, they say he was quite a decent architect, once, and now she's bringing it all out in him again."

. . . The house had not been begun, yet. The Reids were going to remain for the present in Petal's flat; though, no doubt, Reid himself would be often down in Dorsetshire during the autumn and winter, superintending. Charles was a little bit curious as to how the marriage was turning out, though he had no definite apprehensions. He liked Reid, and trusted him. The man was no waster, though he had, so to speak, tumbled into disrepair through a career of nagging misfortune.

Charles found the pair, on this evening of his first visit, sitting in the dining-room, where the table was littered with maps and plans of all sorts and sizes.

"At it already, are you?" He kissed his mother, and nodded in a friendly way to Reid.

Petal said: "Charles, darling, I'm so glad you've come. Tom is bursting with ideas. This is the first time he's shown me the plans of the house, you know. And he will insist on using terrible expressions like 'massing' and 'scale' and 'equalities of the horizontal divisions.' Charles, do *you* know what fenestration is?"

"I seem to have heard that '*fenêtre*' is the French for window," said Charles, sitting down and being helpful. "That may have something to do with it. But do talk simply, Reid, and pity our ignorance. You turn pale and ill, you know, when I use law jargon."

"It isn't only the jargon," said Petal; "it's these plans. I want him just simply to draw me a house, Charles, like this—" She seized a pencil and sketched a childish rectangle with two square windows, a door, and a curl of smoke coming out of the roof.

Reid looked over her shoulder and laughed. "Oddly enough, that's not far off the main idea." He kissed the back of her neck, took the pencil from her fingers, and began to alter and embellish. While he did so, he talked to Charles; talked sense, practical details; but his voice was rapt and hoarse, as though a fire-worshipper had just seen a bank of clouds break into flame. . . . "I've had a find. *Such* a find. Some profiteer idiot has bought an old manor-house, in Suffolk, with the most glorious wall you've ever seen, ringing the park. Four miles round. That wall! It's made of the real mellow clarety bricks—not exactly claret-coloured, more like the ghost of claret, except when the sun shines on them, and then they glow and pour out light. Just the very bricks I wanted for my house. And he sold them to me, the darling! the imbecile!—sold the whole load of them. Says he prefers spiked iron railings. Isn't he a hero? I could knight him for it!" His face, as he spoke, glowed very much like old brick on which the sun has just fallen. . . .

"Have you got the site of the house, yet?" Charles asked, deeply interested.

And Petal cried: "Yes. And he won't let me see it. Did you ever hear of such a tyrant, Charles! As though I were still the age when I want surprises."

Reid said: "We're all of the age that wants surprises. And I've arranged just *when* I want you to see it first. Not for a long time. Charles, imagine a long, low, Queen Anne house in those bricks I told you of, on a knoll that slopes very gently down the valley towards the sea. The sea is about three miles away, but you can see it from the windows. You've got to, because on the ground-floor are what we call seafaring windows: those large simple bow-windows in the façade on either side of the porch. You absolutely mustn't have seafaring windows unless you can see the sea with them. Don't you agree?"

Charles nodded. "Go on. I like it, so far."

Reid muttered: "I can't describe things. I can carry them out, now—now that you've given me the chance. . . . Yes, you, bless you, Petal, my dear! . . . A tall hooded porch, of course, and a wide brick path outside. And then the formal garden, and a view down the slope. Only two floors, and a steep roof of small old tiles. Oh, you know the sort of house! Chunkiness! It's just what a house ought to be. It isn't original. It's sturdy and austere, and it's got dignity, and it doesn't fuss or fret you anywhere. There's a group of elms banking it. I jumped at that. Not too close on the flank. You want to be able to see the house, from a distance, against a dark background. Elms—and the sky. Mon Repos! . . ." He laughed a little unsteadily, and then drew the plans towards him, and lapsed again into obscure technicalities.

Petal did not listen very attentively until, describing the interior, he reached her sitting-room, which he declared should have broad panelling painted in a dim watery green; in one corner, a high hooded alcove, containing shelves for china. . . . "Not Lowestoft. Lowestoft's not bad; but I've got this exactly, Petal. You see, this house is going to express you. It's

got to be serene, and yet not dead nor ancient. I know where I can pick up some Rockingham china. Beautiful stuff, white and green and gold; the real thing, with the view inside the tea-cups, and the Griffin mark. Don't you know it?"

Petal nodded; said she knew it.

". . . Just right for your room. Damn! I meant that to be a surprise. How I do let things out! Here's your room—" He jabbed his pencil down. "—Here. Western aspect. You wanted that, didn't you?"

Petal murmured: "'East, west; home's best!' East is too rough and youthful; and south too blatant; and north too chilly. One can meditate, looking west. Gramarye . . ." (But *was* it that? Or Glamarye? . . . glamour? . . . Well, magic casements, anyway!) "There's never been enough time for meditation, here in London; but there I can lie on my verandah for hours, and gaze westward, out to sea, and grow in strength, sea-strength—"

"What verandah?" said Reid, bluntly.

"My verandah, leading from my sitting-room. I don't think verandah's the proper word for it, though. Too—too rustic; suggestive of trellis-work. I think the same as you do, Tom; Austerity . . . austere columns, and cool spaces between—" She hesitated, not quite sure how her rather vague wish had materialized, except that it had linked itself up with something equally vague called the Greek Ideal: pillars, solitude, herself dreaming, the distant sea, behind her an alcoved room of dim watery green. What a background! . . . Beauty. . . . Solitude . . . Cloisters—no, no, *no,* she did not mean cloisters, but a sort of cloistered *effect.* . . . It was all very simple; especially simple for an architect, whose business it was to turn dreams into brick and stone and marble.

Charles, while she flung her spray, sensed a quick pang of uneasiness; not over the obvious rubbish of her statements—women who knew nothing about architecture could not be blamed for talking rubbish about architecture; just as they did about law or about horses; just as they did about any other subject where their feet did not tread familiar ground.

But from the appalled look on her husband's face he fancied that a fairly brusque contradiction was imminent. And Petal was not used to brusque contradiction. . . . Suppose it led her on to—worse?

"Quite out of the question, Petal. You can't possibly mean it. A verandah, on that house? Oh, call it what you like, roofed loggia? Well, that's just as bad. Cloisters? Greek temple? My dear, you're mad! No, you're not; you're blazingly ignorant. Do leave this to me."

A queer spark in Petal's velvety brown eyes. "Tom, dear, it's you who don't understand. You are being quite tiresomely conventional about this. I simply don't see my house without a little cool silent out-of-door space where I can be alone; body and soul alone."

"Your soul can be alone in your sitting-room; and your body in your bedroom. Besides, you can be alone in practically any part of the garden. Look here, Petal; I'm not 'conventional.' There's no such thing as conventional, over a house. It's a question of beauty, and you're as keen on that as I am. An anachronism *can't* be beautiful. Look here, I'll give you a herb garden, a Dutch garden, a Knot garden . . . all these are in keeping with a house in the Queen Anne style. You can be as alone as anything in all of them. Alone as Susannah before the Elders turned up!"

"Don't joke, Tom. I'm not joking. This is serious to me."

"But see for yourself, my dear. See for yourself. You've got eyes. This isn't a difficult problem. Anyone with taste can just see it by looking. Here's the line of the house, roof, chimneys, windows. It's all beautifully in proportion— My God! Proportion's everything. Solidity . . . chunkiness. . . . Here's the chunk of the house. . . . Ah, you beauty, you! Now here—"

"Please, Tom. I've begged you not to be technical. I'm just a human woman who wants a house to be happy in, that's all. You promised me that. You mustn't be carried away by what doesn't count, Tom dear."

Reid thrust his fists against his temples. He simply could

not understand what could have happened to Petal, to render her suddenly stupid and obstinate and vain; he could not understand that she had associated herself too personally with the house, so that to her it was no detached thing of beauty, but a background for Petal, and that any doubt thrown upon her conception led to Petal offended. Besides, he was talking with authority, and that disturbed her. You cannot bend graciously to succour a poor fellow who—who is towering above you, trying to stoop to your level. It was all wrong. . . .

"Let's get down to it," Tom suggested, patiently. "We both want the same things; what you call things that count and what I call essentials. Well, in a house that's a good house, good in the best sense of the word—talking's not my line, Petal—but in a good, decent, sober house, which is the only sort of house that's fit for a man and woman to live in—they don't, most of the time!—aim for proportion. The proportions of a house are like the soul of a person, you see; you can *feel* if they are right or wrong. Proportion of windows to walls, and walls to each other, and the roof to the lot. You've got to *respect* your dwelling. Nobody wants a lot of footling decorations. If you get your lines so that the lights fall right, that's enough decoration. By lights I mean shadows as well. The roof is built to overhang, to create a shadow that can thrill you, on the wall below. By God, it can thrill you like a great picture, if you get it right; if—"

"Tom, Tom, Tom, spare us. We don't want a lecture on the principles of architecture."

"Sorry if I'm being a bore," said Tom Reid, gruffly. "Look here, shall we put it all away and discuss it some other time?"

"There's nothing to discuss," said Petal, lifting her eyebrows slightly.

"Good!" He heaved a sigh of relief. "You've chucked the verandah."

"No!" said Petal. "The rest of the house is your idea. the verandah's mine; and I want it. I'm not—complete, with-

out it. If, as you say, it spoils the line of the house, coming out there on the western side, from the sitting-room, I don't really mind; we can have it in front, instead."

"In *front?* The roof of the veranda sloping out in *front?*"

"Is that any worse than those seafaring windows that you were so keen about? Did I say, when you proposed them: 'Bow-windows *bulging* out?' "

"But Petal, Petal, they're—right!"

"There you are! I said you were conventional!"

Her husband turned to Charles, with an outward fling of his hands, hinting at despair. But Charles was not looking at him, or at Petal. He was brooding down at the carpet, helplessly awaiting what he had known must happen. He had known it for years. He had first begun to know it when he was no more than seventeen. But he had refused to face it. He was still refusing, but he would not be able to refuse much longer. It was something much more deadly than all this that Petal had already said. It was quite, quite close—could not be averted. The struggle had lasted so long—his own struggle not to see it, not to know of it. Now it was so near that he was paralysed; he would have to sit and listen; afterwards he could get up and go. . . . Afterwards. No good interfering, for it was travelling at a terrific speed, nearer and nearer. . . .

Tom Reid controlled himself with a final struggle, sat down quietly next to Petal, and tried to explain to her how a verandah in any style whatsoever would inevitably mar the house as he had conceived it; and even more drastically from the front than from the side. "The space is too short between the windows of the two floors—see what I mean?—for anything to interrupt the harmony. Divide it, and you get a mean effect."

"Well, you can enlarge the space between the floors, can't you? You would if you weren't so pedantic, and so anxious to thwart me and prove me a fool."

"Petal, look at this design. Just once again. You can't seri-

ously mean that you want anything so preposterous, so utterly abominable, as a verandah grafted on?"

Petal did indeed see that her veranda was an abomination in its present context; but opposition had made her stubborn. She had thrown out her original idea more for the sake of talking beautifully than because it was very deeply rooted, so that it would have been fairly easy to say at once: "Yes, I see that I was wrong. Don't let's bother about it any more." Quite easy, had she not been Petal. Being Petal, she had to twist round the whole world, and architecture, and her husband, and the house, and the laws of harmony, so that she should not have to say: "Yes, I see that I was wrong."

Petal-in-the-Right!

So she said: "You're spoiling a dream, an illusion. Striking your pencil right across it. I feel I don't want a house at all, now."

Tom Reid sat silent for a few moments—seeing his house vanish.

Then he said, with an imitation of cheerfulness that did not for a second deceive Charles: "I'll tell you what we'll have. A different sort of house altogether. Not this one. There's nothing wrong with an actual verandah itself; we must choose a style of house that isn't spoilt by it. Needn't necessarily be ugly. All those bricks wasted, of course," he jerked out. "But still—they can be resold." He drew rapidly on the back of one of his designs. "There you are. Period: Early Victorian; white-plastered frontage, columned entrance, slightly domed roof—here, look—it'll help to carry a verandah. Look, Petal. It's a different type, of course; but not so bad."

"Thank you. I couldn't accept a house that's 'not so bad'! And anyone with imagination could see that I'm hardly an Early Victorian type!"

"My dear, the word's been misused. Many fine mansions were built then. However, call it late Georgian. One of those

jolly little houses built about 1790 or 1810. You often see them in the country. Dark green verandah. It would make the rooms inside rather dark, but it would look all right. The only important thing is to make the house square with its surroundings. So I shall have to find another site."

"Why?" asked Petal, coolly.

"I've told you. Our present site is in character; when I pitched on it, I was thinking of *this* house"— He brought his hand down on the table where his discarded plans lay scattered; and with a nervous, overwrought gesture pushed some of them over the edge on to the carpet.

"Please don't. I hate a lot of papers blowing about." But she hated him for humiliating her in front of her son. A sob arose in her throat, quivered, and was resolutely choked down again. Tom—Tom should suffer for this. He had failed to kneel and do reverence. . . . She felt revengeful.

"You needn't plan any more houses, because I just happen to like this first one, and I couldn't possibly be happy in any other. Happiness is such an evanescent thing. It's simply a pose for you to pretend that you couldn't add a simple verandah, like a temple—the Grecian Age—don't you remember how we loved the Maison Carrée, at Nîmes? It made such an impression on my mind, last month, when we saw it together on our lovely Provençal honeymoon . . . an essentially pure influence. . . . And because I try to bring this permanently into my life, you treat me as though I were a horrid little suburban woman without any sense of beauty whatever. It *is* a pose. A rigid professional pose. Men can't resist it. You've never been able to show off until now, and so—"

"Show off?" shouted Tom. He sprang up and began to stride about the room. "You damn well ought to have the sort of bloody 1890 villa dumped and dotted about at Lower Popham. That's what you deserve. A lot of picturesque gables, my dear, dozens of gables, all very pretty and irregular, and a rustic bridge, and a rustic summer-house and a rustic pergola. Add a loggia, a temple, a verandah and a *stoep*, and call it The Towers! Sense of beauty! Christ! You've spent the

last hour urging me to destroy the one beautiful thing I might ever have been able to create—"

"You might remember," said Petal, in a very distinct little voice. "You might remember that I'm paying for this house. . . ."

CHAPTER II

FORTY BLACK HORSES

. . . Then at last Charles looked up. He saw Tom Reid staring at Petal, with no emotion on his face except surprise, the bewildered surprise of a child. Charles knew that his own expression was not of surprise. He was afraid of Reid's discovering this, so he rose quietly and went out. His final glimpse of husband and wife showed a sudden winning smile of forgiveness from Petal; her hand stretched indulgently towards the delinquent, Tom . . . who still stared, and did not move.

Just outside the flat, Charles met Beatrice Somerset, paying off her taxi.

"Why, it's you, Mr. Elvaston!" They did not know each other very well, but Charles had met her occasionally. She was one of Petal's hallelujah chorus.

"Are you going in there?" he asked.

"Yes. Just for a chat and a cocktail. And then we're all pushing off together to dine with Jean Ravenhill and her fiancé, at the Berkeley. Aren't you coming, too? Or are you heart-broken about Jean? Perhaps I ought not to have asked you. The world is so full of happy couples now, isn't it?" Beatrice sighed, and looked pensive. "I suppose Tom and Petal are radiant?"

"I shouldn't go in, if I were you. Not now." To fill a sudden gap in Beatrice's flow of conversation, and yet avoid the question which he knew hovered on her lips, he said quickly: "Come and have a cocktail with me, instead."

Beatrice hesitated. "That's very kind of you, but Petal will be expecting me. It's an arrangement. I haven't seen them since I came back, and there are so many things I want to consult her about. She's not ill, is she?"

"No, she's not ill," slowly. "Only—occupied. Besides, I hate having a cocktail alone, and I haven't been invited to Jean's party, so I want consolation." He found himself perfectly able to speak lightly, quizzingly, to this nuisance of a woman whose name he could not even remember. Oh yes, Somerset!—"Do come, Mrs. Somerset. My car's here. I'll put it right with Petal, afterwards."

"How handsome he is!" thought Beatrice Somerset. "I never noticed it so much before." For the sake of a handsome man, and his handsome car, she decided to play truant, and stepped into the Bentley beside him.

Charles drove off. He wondered, avoiding another car that took a corner too fast—or was it the Bentley that was going too fast?—whether in his present state he could even have noticed a collision, had there been one.

Mrs. Somerset drawled on: "This is rather a concession, you know, Mr. Elvaston. If you hadn't looked so forlorn—"

Charles laughed, and she joined in the laughter, convinced that, after all, his heart had not been broken by Jean's engagement. . . . "And yet, I don't know; something jarring about the way he laughed!" She went on, aloud: "—Because I did really want to see Petal, you know; to see her alone, for a few minutes. My own affairs are in such a tangle, and I feel that, whichever end I pull, the knot will tighten. Petal has a wonderful way with knots; she just seems to breathe on them, and they fall loosely apart. You're very lucky in your mother, Mr. Elvaston. But of course you know that; I've seen you together."

Charles drew up at Claridges. "Yes," he agreed. "But she has a husband, now."

"That needn't make a difference, need it?" Beatrice wondered if he was jealous of Tom Reid.

. . . "Two dry Martinis," said Charles to the waiter.

His guest continued, rather anxious to draw him on the subject of his stepfather, for she was a psychological tease: "You've had a stepfather before, haven't you?"

"I never met Soper. He was rather a bad hat. Odd that of

Petal's three husbands she was longest with him." He did not notice that already he spoke as though her union with Tom had come to an end.

"Yes, it *is* odd. Because he appreciated her least. Petal has told me. She stuck it wonderfully, year after year; but he didn't—he didn't ever *see* her; he hadn't enough fineness, I suppose. Coarse-grained. Petal has said often that to live with him was like feeling something gradually die inside her. But it has taught her to understand men, hasn't it? And that's the seed-pod of the flower that died—" Charles supposed this to be a quotation from Petal—"that's why I wanted to ask her so much about my own poor unhappy affairs. Petal's not the kind that gets so engrossed when she's happy herself that she hasn't time for others."

A long pause. The Martinis were brought.

. . . "I can't get out of it," thought Charles, sardonically resigned. And aloud: "Won't I do, Mrs. Somerset, as a makeshift confidant?" The trouble was that he felt himself beginning to be alive again, and capable of—not exactly sorrow or mourning, but—yes, distinctly, of temper. The numb acceptance which had kept him passively seated in Petal's dining-room while she destroyed herself was passing away. Damn Beatrice Somerset, and her cocktails, and the long story that she was obviously about to unfold to him! Why, after all, had he not let her carry it to Petal, instead of intercepting it? Petal, Tom, the Somersets, seemed equally strangers to him; but his temper was rising, and it was a temper with years of strength behind it. "She's well away," he muttered, but only half listening. . . . "Timothy this" and "Timothy that" and "Should a wife—?" and "After all, one has one's self-respect" and "I dare say it was as much her fault as his"—Oh, all the old gags!

Then, suddenly, he heard Loveday's name. He broke in abruptly: "Loveday Trevelyan? Do you know her?" And wished now that he had heard more of the surrounding context.

"Do *you?* But of course you do. I remember now; Petal told me. She stayed at Lethburnham Mansions, last winter,

didn't she, for a little while? So perhaps I oughtn't to have said what I did. Are you in love with her, Mr. Elvaston?"

It was a pity, Charles reflected irritably, that there did not exist a little more old-world reticence between men and women who hardly knew each other. "No," he answered, gravely, "I haven't seen her since February."

"She came and stayed with Judith Maitland while Tim and I were there, in the spring." Beatrice, having finished her second cocktail, was suddenly overwhelmed by an old grievance. "I've been too magnanimous about that minx of a girl. I don't see that it's my business to protect her from scandal. You're a lawyer, aren't you, Mr. Elvaston?"

"Yes." Charles wondered, grimly, if Beatrice intended to brief him in a divorce case of Somerset v. Somerset, with Loveday as co-respondent? He could just fit it in nicely, when the Penrhu case was over.

From being vindictive, Beatrice shifted to the flippant line, which she believed suited her personality better. "She eloped with my husband, last May. Kind of her, wasn't it? Tim offered no resistance, I believe. Then there was a muddle about their passport at the frontier, so she brought him back again, and was *so* astonished when I seemed to be slightly annoyed! I suppose, really, we're no match for the modern girl, once we're past thirty! But I can't say that I've forgiven Loveday Trevelyan. That sort of promiscuous eloping is rather bad form, don't you think?" She sighed, and lit a cigarette. "I wonder whether we forgive our husbands because we love them, or because it saves trouble?"

"I've never had nor been a husband, so I don't know," said Charles, glooming at her third cocktail. . . . ("Wonder if she's going to rook me for a fourth?")

"If you'd had or been a wife," from Beatrice, in the spirit of jewelled repartee, "you'd have been so much more useful to me. After all, I think I shall have to take my predicament to Petal. I may seem to you to be laughing all the time, but at the moment I could just as easily cry!"

—Hastily Charles caught the waiter's eye, and paid him;

his lawyer's training told him that there had been, or rather there now was, a successor to Loveday in Timothy Somerset's life; and that Beatrice was going to divulge it as though reluctantly—which always takes longer than when it willingly streams forth. "I hate to hurry you, Mrs. Somerset, but if you're going to dine with Jean, and pick up my mother first, and have a long, long talk with her—"

"Oh, yes. I must fly. How wicked of you to have kept me here so long; tempting me with cars and Claridges and cocktails and confidences—all the things I like most!"

"All the things I absolutely rave about," Charles agreed. "Will you mind if I get them to call you a taxi, and don't drop you, myself, at Petal's? I've got rather a rush ahead of me."

. . . Rather a rush ahead of him!

He was able to drive through the park at a fairly tolerable speed; but Kensington was interminable, a jam of 'buses and taxis and carts. Charles would have liked every road swept clear for him that evening, in his lowering, glowering mood. He stopped in front of a small private hotel in Holland Park, and sent up an imperious message by the page: "If Miss Trevelyan is in, tell her that Mr. Elvaston is outside, waiting to take her for a drive, and would she please be quick?"

. . . He was always right when he thought the worst of people. Last February, for instance, when, laden with spoil from her Budapest expedition, Loveday had come to his rooms, eager for more spoil. He had been right then.

Only wrong when he tried to worship. No person and nothing and no god who could be worshipped, in the world or beyond it! He had always known, ever since Dion Truefitt had let him down. He had known. . . . Just a few weeks of faith in Petal, adoring her, and then he had begun to see through Petal, too. But he had remained obstinate. He was damn well not going to allow another altar to sway, topple, and collapse; damn well not going to lift up his heavy load again, his load of worship, and drag it about in further search. . . . Hell!

How all his life he had longed to kneel and lift up his arms to someone, something! . . . Here he was, boxed up under a hard sky, with a lot of fallible humbugging humans— "And I'm as bad as the worst!"—Yet for thirteen years he had remained obstinate about Petal; persistently producing her, and then reassuring himself by the results; or by listening to the pæans of those who were more easily fooled. For thirteen years he had stopped up the whistling draughts of truth, so that they should not blow out the candles he had lit. He was *not* wrong in his second adoration; his pride would not let him be wrong, twice.

But it had been hard work.

. . . Over, now. No man could keep it up in the face of that one give-away; Petal's one retort that denied all the generosity which he had acclaimed for thirteen stubborn years.

Her money paying for the house!

He was free of altars now, and free of lies. What a liar he had been; aloud and silently, to Petal and to himself, and to all the world, and to Loveday! Loveday, who had had the confounded audacity, last winter, to recognize his lie, and charge him with it! . . .

But here she was, a tall glimmering figure in grey squirrel, standing on top of the steps. From the way that she halted for an instant, motionless, he could see that she was gloriously happy, and afraid to encounter her happiness lest it should dwindle and shrink. Well—let the young pirate be happy! . . . Plenty to be happy about! He was going to ask her to marry him, a man with three hundred thousand pounds! What more could she want? Happy? She would be happier still, presently. You were lucky if you only groped for material goods, like Loveday.

She came down the steps, and Charles suddenly remembered that they had not met since the night when they had quarrelled, in his rooms, eight months ago. Blast! Why had he not seen her yesterday, to banish the need, now, of ceremonial stuff? He was much too irritable to say: "How well

you're looking!" or "It's a long time since we have met, isn't it?"

But he forgot that Loveday was of his own breed and generation.

"Where are we going?" she asked, as casually as though they had already been lunching together, that day. She dropped down into the seat beside him; slammed the door. Her breath was coming fast, and her eyes were starry and jubilant under the brim of her pull-on grey felt hat. She was nearer heaven than she had ever been before. To call for her like this, on an impulse, as though they were friends and more than friends, as though they had never quarrelled, as though he could trust her to capture the spirit of the moment, to be fleet and gay and subtle! . . . "Oh, darling Charles! *Darling!*" she whispered, not for him to hear.

The car slid away down the broad main road towards Shepherds Bush. He could see how pale she was, in the dark; but the moon was not yet up and she could not see how dark he was, how much darker than in the darkest moments she had known him. And he had not yet said a single word.

How queer it all was! And why was Charles driving at this absurd breakneck pace, as though he were on a country road? Not that she minded; she liked speed and danger, especially after the sun had set, and especially when everything she had left behind was so horrid and commonplace and dingy. . . . Mummy talking all the time of witnesses and poor Augusta and the badness of hotel meals. . . .

They swung round towards Hammersmith, and grazed the side of a tram. The driver swore at them, and Charles sharply swore back.

"Dear Charles!" murmured Loveday, happily. "That's the first thing I've heard you say since—since the last thing I heard you say."

"What was that?" Charles asked.

She would not tell him.

("Good-night, Debonair.")

Hammersmith Broadway. Still treating London as though it were empty, and he king of its emptiness, Charles drove ferociously the wrong way round the wrong island; was stopped by a policeman; and listened with an impatient frown to what was said to him for his own good. Then he uttered a few curt remarks about the inefficiency of all the traffic arrangements in that part of London; swung the Bentley round again, and crashed off in the direction of Chiswick, Kew, and the Bath Road, pounding along at about forty miles an hour.

"What a sunshine boy!" reflected Loveday, unable to disguise from herself that Charles was in a mysteriously bad temper.

But if so, why had he not chosen to go to bed, or to a revue, or to talk with a college pal or—to his mother, to Petal?

Perhaps it was because Mummy had loaded him up with the defence of this wearisome Penrhu case that he was so angry; but, even then, it seemed a little bit ridiculous to take her down to dine at Maidenhead to express himself on the subject; a good deal easier to be angry over the telephone, and then leave the victim in a sodden heap, and take someone else out for dinner.

At Colnbrook, where the road was at its narrowest, they had to crawl, chafing, behind a lorry. Charles never stopped sounding his horn, even when he realized that it was impossible for the lorry ahead to pass what was blocking its way.

Loveday began to laugh.

"What's the joke?" said Charles, with a quick angry glance at her, and away again.

"Not very well with yourself, this evening, are you, Charles?"

"I've never been better with myself in my life," Charles asserted, seizing an opening that was just wide enough, but did not look it; and treading heavily on the accelerator.

"Mettlesome, that's what I call it!" whispered Loveday, so that he should hear. "Mettlesome!"

"For Hell's sake stop talking till we get out of all this bloody traffic!" was what Charles wanted to shout at her; but

he controlled himself, with an effort that was almost visible in its intensity.

And Loveday, understanding that his black mood was beyond careless comment, lapsed into silence. "Better not rag him." . . .

After all, it was good enough to be sitting here, beside Charles, in whatever mood he had bothered to fetch her. His wish for her company was a treasured sign; and it was October the seventh, and seven was her lucky number. Perhaps after supper—was it still warm enough to sup out of doors, at the riverside branch of the Café de Londres at Cookham, successfully run by George Wayburn? Rather amusing to consider that she and Charles had first met by one of Wayburn's offhand inspirations. Supper on the lawn . . . heavenly! Or was the season over now? October. Yes, it would be over. Oh, well, Maidenhead, then, Murrays or Skindles . . . and all the murky past washed clear behind them.

But Charles thundered through Maidenhead without stopping. It was the middle of the week, and very few cars were on the Bath Road, so he was able to let her out to forty-five, and then to fifty miles an hour, reckless of possible police-traps.

The Bentley was going splendidly, and Loveday had ceased to wonder over the wheres and whys of this high-handed kidnapping. She was enjoying it; she was contented. . . . Even when a dog strolled at leisurely pace into the middle of the road, and Charles, without slackening, had to swerve nearly into the ditch to avoid running over the animal, and began to swear again, he still drove at fifty miles an hour and said: "I want you to marry me, Loveday."

(. . . Why people can't keep their hell-dogs in their god-damn houses at night!)

—"Did you hear me?" he demanded, impatiently, a few seconds later.

For she was too awed with happiness to answer at once. And besides she wanted him to go on, tell her how much he loved her, and that he had loved her all the time.

But now she said softly, and scarcely daring to trust her shining luck: "I'm sorry I ran away from your mother, Charles, last February."

"It didn't matter. I shan't expect you to hit it off with Petal. I've got over expecting that."

Loveday was startled by the rasp in his tone on the name "Petal," the name that had always been glossed by him with the persistent varnish of adoration, till now. Could that have happened at last which she had so longed for during her nightmare stay at the flat? Had he at last been compelled to face his own lie, and discard it, and do without? Had even Petal made a mistake? Petal-in-the-Right?

"—Besides, that's your lay, isn't it, Loveday? Running away? There was that acrobat fellow from Budapest, and then Timothy Somerset—"

"How do you know about Tim?"

. . . They were flying through another town, but Charles did not choose to slacken speed. A voice called out something, angrily, in their wake.

"His wife told me. I had cocktails with her, today. That's why I came to fetch you for this drive."

She turned towards him, mute, bewildered. What would be the help of telling this—this strange man that she had not eloped with Tim for Tim's sake; that Tim was merely a tool to overcome the obstacle, in her dash from Italy to London, to Charles himself. Why—why couldn't Charles be himself again? He was as far away from himself now as sometimes in the old days at the flat. But differently. Then, even when he had repressed all else, good breeding had remained. Now there was a jeering reckless quality in the way, that not even for courtesy's sake, not even for love's sake, would he bother to control his brutal sentiments:

"You needn't bother to explain the episode, Loveday. I don't mind. I'm glad. I like you to behave like an infernal little fool, and rush about, and elope, and get splashed with mud. As long as you don't pretend! And you haven't a chance of pretending, with me. Nor I with you, for that mat-

ter. Know too much about each other, don't we? What are you looking like that for?" he jerked out. "I tell you, I'm *glad* you eloped with Somerset. I'm going to marry you, Loveday. I asked you about ten minutes ago. Or shall we take 'yes' for granted?"

"We damn well won't!" Loveday flashed back. Her happiness was rushing from her like a shower of sparks quenched in muddy water. It had barely lasted an hour. What lay beneath all this? She had to know. Why had he proposed to her if he obviously despised her so?

She asked him.

"I don't despise you, Loveday. Darling, beautiful Loveday! I don't despise you. I just—recognize you. You don't want me kneeling in front of you; kneeling, and lifting my arms in prayer. You've seen me in that rather ridiculous attitude, and you haven't liked it much. . . . Don't you remember? You won't ever see me on my knees again. I'm insuring against that. I've done with shrines. There's not the faintest danger, not a shred, not a glimmer, that I shall ever feel that way about you."

"Is that why—why you honoured me by your choice? Is that why you're glad I eloped with Tim Somerset? Because the worse I am—?" The lump in her throat stopped her. But she need not have queried, for she was sure, now. Quite sure of what had happened to Charles; and that he did not love her, rather hated her, in fact.

"—Is it because the rottener I am, the gladder you'll be?"

Up to the present he had kept his eyes fixed in the travelling patch of road between the trembling headlights. Now he flashed round a sudden smile on her.

. . . Loveday shivered. She had not known Charles could look so nearly diabolic.

"Damn all pretences!" he cried, gaily. It looked as though his sinister mood had lifted, but she was more afraid of him, triumphant. "Damn all pretences! You've always been proud of being a buccaneer, Loveday. Well, here's your treasure-ship, so out with the grappling irons! I needn't tell you my

income; you know it. . . . Don't you remember ragging me as the Underground King? I'll say how wonderful you are, all day long, as long as you don't expect either of us to believe it. When will you marry me, Loveday?"

"Never. You want to marry me because you'd be safe; because I'm the sort of girl you couldn't ever worship, or even respect, because of the mad things I've done. I'm never going to marry you if those are your reasons. You can get to hell out of it!"

. . . But among all the impossibilities she had ever pictured, none more impossible than that Charles should ever be asking her to be his wife, and she be refusing him.

The man's foot went down on the accelerator and the Bentley leapt forward from fifty to sixty miles an hour. "You're posing," he said briefly. "How long d'you mean to keep it up?"

She was silent. Her lips were very scornful, and her eyes steadfast. She could not wrangle with her lover as to whether it were a pose or not that she should say "no" to him, when he dared to ask her to marry him because he believed her so rotten, so cheap, so greedy, that there was no peril that he need ever be on his knees again.

Misunderstanding her silence, he suddenly began to rave at her: "You little fool. You stubborn little fool. What do you hope to gain from this? Don't I know you? You and your loot! Haven't you boasted to me that you're hard, and out for what you can get? Here's your prey, then—soft and easy. I'll give you a good time, I tell you. You've *got* to marry me. I won't put up with it—all this coy stuff from *you!* It's an outrage. What's the game, fluttering and holding back? You can call me a cad; you can call me a ruffian; you can call me any damn name under the sun; but we're going to be married, I tell you that. Next week. This week. Before this footling case comes on. Make your mother withdraw it. I'll give her eight hundred a year. That was a good move of yours, Loveday, to brief me as your defending counsel. Clever Loveday. Pretty Loveday—"

"Don't, Charles. Be quiet! That's not true! It was Mummy!" He laughed.

The cold air hummed past them even more quickly, like the cutting of wire against their faces. Charles had never once said where he was going, where he was driving her. . . . Just rushing her on and on over black roads, in his black mood. . . . And now he had laughed at the faltering: "It was Mummy!" Just for an instant, hearing that laugh, Loveday was tempted. After all, stripped of its rose glory, the fact of his offer remained. Why should she not marry him? As he had so kindly pointed out, she had longed to sack a city. And here was a rich city opening its gates for her. She could marry Charles, not caring for the spirit in which he had proposed to her. A proposal from hell or from heaven—the result was the same. Not Loveday, to be particular whether the wine was poured into her glass over the right or the left shoulder. She would be his wife, away from Mummy, and the case, and being poor, and scoldings, and horrid little second-class hotels. Swooped up and removed from all that; Charles' wife. Was she not just being foolishly young, foolishly romantic, to demand a romantic proposal from him?

She looked at him again, a long, long look. . . . "No. Never mind my side of it. But he mustn't marry me. Not for those reasons: not because he's been let down by Petal, and in a foul temper. Not good enough . . . for Charles. He'd be miserable for the rest of his life. *I* might scoop some sort of happiness out of it, because I'm a greedy one, and like to have lots of money, whizz round in cars and dance and enjoy myself, and buy clothes. But he—he mustn't marry for a caddish reason. It's all wrong. It would be a sort of—I don't know—indecent, a sort of treachery, if I let him do it."

"This—maternal instinct that they say you get for a man. 'Lay down your head on my breast, dear heart,' all indulgent. I've never felt a maternal one, towards Charles. . . . *Never.* He's been—so frightfully near! I couldn't be nearer friends with anyone, not with another girl, or of my own age, or anyone. . . . Why, I sort of get a jump of understanding

even about the way he misunderstands. Like now. Because . . . there was Petal. What was the name I had for him? The man with a load of—worship! I can't let him down on this lay. . . ."

So she decided to pay her sorrowful penalty for being a friend of Charles, as well as loving him.

And having decided, Loveday suddenly flung her temper, too, into the same cauldron where Charles' temper seethed: "Stop and put me down, I tell you! Slow up! Stop! I won't be carried along like this, being proposed to. I've told you that I won't marry you, and I'm not going on with you, and I'm not going back with you. You've got to stop the car and put me down! You—you God-Almighty one! All scowling and thundery because you can't get your own way!"

Charles merely drove on. Telegraph-poles flew by on either side, rising and falling in sickening waves. Loveday seized Charles' arm with both her hands and shook it.

He said curtly: "Dangerous thing to do, going at this rate."

"Didn't you hear me asking you to stop?"

"Yes. I heard. Please be practical. I can't possibly put you down in the middle of the road between Hungerford and Marlborough."

"Is that where we are? Will you put me down at the station at Marlborough?"

"Yes, if you insist."

"I do insist. Hell! . . . Charles, you used to be able to *get* a situation. . . . Do you think we could drive all the way back, you and I snuggled up together, after the things we've been saying to each other? I'd rather die." She added, half laughing and half sobbing: "—Why couldn't you propose to me keeping still, somewhere?"

He did not answer, nor did he speak another word until they drew up outside the station at Marlborough. It was very silent. Presently a porter slouched in sight, and informed them that there would be a slow train in twenty minutes, change at Swindon. Loveday alighted and looked at Charles. "You're

to go!" she said in the style of a royal princess dismissing an impecunious suitor.

Charles raised his hat, stepped back into the car, and drove off. The booking-office was not open. Loveday hung about in desolation.

Six minutes later she saw Charles re-entering the booking-office.

She slightly raised her delicate eyebrows, turned towards him an indifferent profile. "Couldn't you exist away from the Beloved?"

"I'll exist in a separate carriage, if you're worrying about that."

. . . For hardly had Charles driven away from the station before it occurred to him that Loveday, as usual, would probably be without money to buy her ticket to town. Naturally, after what had just happened, she would not have cared to ask him for her fare; so he could see no way out of her predicament unless he parked his car at the nearest garage and voluntarily returned by train himself. In which case it would be natural for him to take the tickets, and need not embarrass her.

They ignored each other, for the next quarter of an hour. Then Charles bought a couple of first-class tickets. She went on the platform, and waited, sitting on a truck. It began to occur to her, quite poignantly, that she had had no dinner. The same fact struck Charles, pacing away from her, towards the end of the platform. His last refreshment had been three cocktails with Beatrice Somerset. What fun life was!

At last the train sauntered in, as though reluctantly. Charles assisted Loveday into an empty first-class carriage, and then said, politely: "I hope you don't mind; I'm going in a smoker." And he handed her her ticket.

Loveday slightly bent her head. She was tired and disillusioned, or she might have laughed.

Presently she, too, got up, and walked along the corridor until she found an empty smoking-carriage. She sat down and lit a cigarette.

They went through the same ridiculous performance at Swindon, where they had to change trains. Again they waited interminably; again they were separately conscious of being extremely hungry. Charles went and had a look at the buffet, but his haughtiness recoiled from buns and sponge-cakes. He hoped that perhaps Loveday might have had some dinner before she started. He had rather lost count of time, but it must have been about seven o'clock when he fetched her; and that sort of boarding-house, he thought, vaguely, often had dinner at a freakish hour like seven. He thought of these details because he did not want to think, not yet, that Loveday had refused him. And refused him rather well. . . . "Debonair!" he muttered, staring down the railway lines where they curved into the dark.

When the train came in, again he helped her into an empty first-class carriage; again he requested her permission to go into a smoker; and again Loveday, after he had gone, went into another smoker herself. Thus they travelled back to London.

From Paddington they had to be side by side for a few minutes, while he took her home in a taxi. Confound this complication of money! He could neither put her into a taxi and go home alone, nor could he give her a treasury note and tactfully allow her to keep the change. . . . Not after all their jesting that lay behind it, and all their quarrels.

"Good-night, Loveday." He was still wrathful with her. Wrathful . . . but wondering.

"Good-night, Charles." And she was furious with him, but did not wonder. There was nothing to wonder about. She knew.

He drove back to his rooms. Morgan met him with a face decorously shocked, and a message. Tom Reid had shot himself. Charles was to go round at once to Petal. . . .

CHAPTER III

CHARLES MEETS CHARLES

CHARLES was very tired, but he could not sleep. He lay back with closed eyes in an arm-chair of the jade-and-opal sitting-room wherein Petal had expressed her decorative talents. Behind the curtains and behind the blinds the London early morning was bleak and colourless. He had switched on the electric fire, for he was cold. He remembered how Loveday hated electric fires, so impersonal, so easily controlled; as much as she had hated the service flat, and the hired car, and all the other detached luxuries of Petal's existence. Loveday had been right. For when it came to a house, a house of her own, warmly and intimately conceived, Petal's superb self-production had been shattered to bits.

Petal was asleep, now. She had cried a lot, in Charles' arms; yet she had been very brave, and had consented to take all the aspirin that the doctor had prescribed. Charles had had to leave her, then, cursing because she was not in the sort of home where an old affectionate servant could be trusted to take charge. He had to go round first to the police, with the doctor; then to Tom Reid's old room, his room in Bloomsbury, before he married. For there he had elected to retire with his revolver; perhaps out of gentle consideration for Petal; or perhaps feeling that his wife's home was not the type where a man might comfortably shoot himself.

All this sickening official stuff to be gone through! They had taken the body off to the mortuary, to await inquest. When Charles returned to the flat, at dawn, Petal, thank goodness, was asleep. Petal really was, as her friends said, "wonderful." Charles, not being in the least wonderful, was unable to sleep. He was exhausted, his eyes burned, and his brain was working in short broken twitches. . . .

He had had much to tire him, during the last twenty-four hours. A journey from the north of Scotland—yet that was nothing, in a sleeper. But then the strain of listening to the quarrel between Petal and Tom. . . . And after that the cocktails with Beatrice Somerset. . . . And his drive with Loveday to Marlborough, and their train journey home again. . . . And the message that he had found in his rooms.

And the sight of Tom. He had been fond of Tom.

Also, he had met shame three times during the twenty-four hours; bitter, savage shame. The first encounter had mattered the least, although for years it had seemed no worse could befall him than that the real Petal should betray herself so completely that even her proud and obstinate son could not uphold her any longer. He was ashamed, not of her, for she could not help it, but of himself, that he had lacked the courage for thirteen years, to say: "This is a mistake—another mistake, after my mistake about Dion and about God. I cannot worship here, either. I must drag on my load." . . .

On the third encounter his shame had been the most poignant; though he was alone when it attacked him, almost directly after Morgan had given him the message of Reid's suicide.

. . . Suddenly Charles had realized that his first sensation, simultaneous with the shock, had been of relief, sheer relief that the only other human being except himself who had heard Petal at the ghastly crisis of her meanness and vanity had been wiped out. And that now no person alive had seen Charles humiliated.

Relief. . . . Then it smote him like a blow of light that in his colossal egoism, his arrogant and overwhelming sense of property, he had been looking on this unclothing of Petal as his own tragedy, and no one else's. He had been looking on Tom Reid as merely the cause and the witness; almost as an irrelevant intruder. . . .

But Tom had shot himself. And he, Charles, had only taken a girl for a long motor drive; lost his temper; and upon her had tried to work off his anger.

. . . And that brought him face to face with his second shame.

For after his deliberate pseudo-idolatry of Petal had crashed, he had spun right over to reaction: again a modern Timon, he would henceforth view each living creature as a sycophant; mercenary, self-seeking. He would laugh and not care. Cynically he would rejoice at the exposure of mankind, having humoured mankind towards exposure. Start with this Loveday, then, this girl pirate, unworthy of honour, her hands always reaching out to plunder him. Start with her. Start tonight by proposing to her. No likelihood that Loveday would refuse him.

Loveday had refused him.

Three times he had been brought face to face with himself.

Charles was very tired, but there was no escape. Ultimately he was capable of facing himself. And he had to pay dawn forfeit.

CHAPTER IV

PETAL-IN-THE-RIGHT

IT was strange, thought Charles, that, having now abandoned his strained attitude of prayer in front of Petal-in-the-Right, he should love her with so much more tenderness. Petal, of course, was aware of no change.

. . . He lay back in a deep chair, listening to her, on the afternoon that followed the morning's inquest. Petal was on the divan, surrounded by two or three friends, hushed, devoted, solicitous. Then another friend came in; and another. Two more. A rally of friends to help her through her hour. Petal was being *so* wonderful; more and more wonderful, indeed, as each friend, male or female, joined the adoring group in the sitting-room of the flat. . . . Charles lay back with a queer lightened feeling in his heart, and listened to Petal putting herself right about Tom Reid's death. His mood was anxious and compassionate. . . . It would not be easy for her. There, below all the manœuvring, all her broken darts and flutterings, her détours, her rationalizations, there, below it all, lay the irrevocable fact that her husband had shot himself rather than live with her. Fervently he hoped that she would not be compelled at last to come face to face with fact—as he had been forced to do; he, Petal's son. She had lived too long dishonestly; it would break her; she would die of it. . . .

But as he listened, his anxiety dissolved into what was almost amusement—would have been sheer amusement, indeed, had the comedy been less a tragedy. . . . He alone could appreciate her talented performance, as she tried one road after another, and was turned back again, frightened, aware that all ways were precarious. She was fighting for her life, fighting to get herself right. . . .

. . . "No, please let me speak!" Thus Petal. "It helps me to bear it; we oughtn't to crush things down. Tom always said—forgive me, I can't call him Poor Tom!—Tom always said that I helped him to get things clear by talking them over with him. Of course I'm terribly ignorant. . . ."

(And all the time, her friends were murmuring when they should have murmured; praising her when they should have praised her; saying "no, no," and "yes, yes," and "Dearest Petal!")

"Terribly ignorant. . . ." But no, it would not do. Her ignorance, that led to—verandahs. Double back, then, and quickly!—Charles noticed how the instinct of self-preservation, conscious?—he was not sure!—forbade her from mentioning that verandah. It had become a symbol of horror. Poor little Petal was longing to emerge again, triumphant and whole, into that most finite, most restfully limited world where she was divinely incapable of ever being held in the wrong.

". . . He had had so little success in his profession. . . . As though a flower had died inside him, leaving only the seed-pod. It cramped him more and more, having to obey other, much lesser men. He was afraid of losing his vision. Oh, what could be worse than losing one's vision?"

("Nothing," murmured Petal's friends. "There's nothing worse. . . .")

And here, thrown from Petal herself towards another, a drowning Petal, here was the right cue. She clung to her discovery! Of course!—Why had she not seen it before? "So little real solid success," Petal mused sadly. "Darling Tom was a failure as an architect because he lacked the human touch with his clients. . . ." Yes, she remembered clearly now, she had once heard two men, one of them a colleague of Tom's—discussing him: "Gets impatient before he's even begun to explain himself. Then off he goes, headlong, leaving an angry client behind. It's lack of imagination, really. . . ."

"When we—when we talked things over together, he and I, about the house he was building for me, I kept on asking myself: 'Why, *why* is he so far away?' And that's what his

clients must have felt, too. Clients are human, and artists are so much more than human, so that's—that's how he failed us. . . ."

Charles, with a quick protective gesture, leant forward—for one moment tense with anxiety. He had been swift to see that Petal's own discovery had betrayed her. Tom's *clients?* Well, but had Petal been no more than a client to Tom? Had she been ready to give him no more than a client would have given him? Once she admitted that Tom had groped for the freedom that only love could freely allow him, and had found grimly, yet once again, a commission and a client to be propitiated—once she admitted that pitiful error . . . But no, just in time. . . . Ah, wonderful Petal! sublime in her technique! She quite simply skipped that point and went serenely on. You could hardly have told, save that Charles had been that way himself, that she had looked at danger. Straight on, with what seemed to be good consecutive reasoning:

". . . And so, because Tom failed in his object through his lack of a little human understanding, in the same way he failed in his married life. It would have been the same with anyone—even if he had married somebody wonderfully wise and understanding, as I know I'm not. . . ."

(And here a series of cloud-bursts from Petal's friends: "Darling, don't; you were wonderful. No one could have done more. You mustn't give way now. Who could have helped him as you have done? . . .")

Petal was gradually gathering power, twisting herself free of her soul's dilemma, and Charles could abandon watchfulness. He barely listened now. . . . Smiled a little as isolated phrases caught his attention. . . .

". . . You are all being sweet to me. Forgive me if I'm talking nonsense. Really, this is doing me so much good . . . helping me to get it straight. I want to get it straight. The greatest gift my love could evolve for him—a completely free hand, space, and leisure; but not, *not* if it were to be at the expense of other people's little needs and conflicts."

("No, no. You did everything. . . . Space and leisure . . ." murmured Petal's audience.)

". . . The chill of immortality. . . . But don't they lose touch with things? I thought he wanted my help as a woman more than as a partner. I wanted to be a rest to him. I wanted to share our home—not to be a tenant, a tenant on sufferance. . . . But he was meant to be celibate, because art is like religion . . . too fine for this world. . . . Artists . . . mountain peaks. . . . We mustn't sit in judgment—we who are content with the smaller things. . . ."

A tiny cloud of perplexity in her eyes? . . . Which way, next? . . . Had there been a dip, a sag in her peroration? Had she once more, for a second, caught a glimpse of the—verandah? *Who* had failed—she or Tom?

". . . After all," cried Petal, soaring grandly, with suave unfolded wings, out of the mist and tangle and web of conflict with uneasy truth, "after all," cried Petal, effecting her final escape, and in front of her hushed audience producing, as though from a conjuring-box, an eternally comforting cliché which meant so splendidly less than nothing, "after all, the greatest failures are sometimes the most beautiful successes. . . ."

Her son felt somewhat hysterical. As though from a great distance, he heard her soft voice murmuring, like an amen following upon a hymn of triumph: "Nothing is wasted . . . ever. . . ."

—Not even the bricks. They were resold at quite a fair profit. Beautiful mellow bricks that Tom Reid had loved, because when the sun poured on to them, they glowed like old wine. . . .

Charles was almost too weary to marvel at what he had heard. Perhaps he envied Petal. Certainly he need not have feared for her. The catastrophe was over, and she remained for all time Petal-in-the-Right.

But what a funny little mother to find and to love, after so many years! . . .

His love, he realized, was whittled down to the rather

Victorian quality of an elderly husband, wise, limiting, inasmuch as he had not believed in her enough to desire that she should face the truth. So infinitely better that she need not be frightened any more. For Tom was dead.

Another visitor. . . . Another idolater. . . . And out came the story afresh, with slight alterations, luxurious additions, little deft touches.

Charles listened. . . .

CHAPTER V

JUNIOR COUNSEL

CHARLES ELVASTON, barrister-at-law, made rather an impressive spectacle as he sat in his chambers on the eve of the hearing of the case: In the estate of Augusta Penrhu, Trevelyan v. Penrhu, in the Probate Division of the High Court of Justice. He was correctly wearing a morning coat, and dark grey striped trousers. His face had settled, as though automatically, into those keen lines of justice and omnipotence which the air of the Temple induces in its occupants. In front of him an enormous Chippendale table was piled with briefs, and more briefs were littered on another table in a corner of the room. A lay visitor might have thought, had he not known that the Law detested ostentation, that all the briefs in all the chambers of that building had been assembled on Charles Elvaston's table. Certainly all those which Charles had ever received during his five years in chambers were duly brought out for display, as though—carelessly—those had come in during the morning; one or two last night, perhaps! For barristers have their legitimate methods of inspiring confidence in the hearts of their clients. The rest of the room, however, was not a frowsy conglomeration of tomes, cobwebs, and red tape, in the style of the old-fashioned lawyer; these had been banished to an inner room with Nigel-the-Clerk. This room in which Charles sat and awaited the arrival of those summoned to conference was rather empty and well-bred; biscuit-coloured walls; a couple of D. Y. Cameron etchings, a row of Chippendale chairs, stiffly arranged opposite the desk and where the light would fall on the faces of the witnesses.

Mr. Gavin, of the solicitors' firm of Gavin, Gray & Gavin,

was already present. It was twenty-nine minutes past five. At half past five, Mrs. and Miss Trevelyan were due to arrive; also Dr. Severn, late of Porto Rinaldo, and Herr and Frau Gerstemunde, and the proprietress of the Albergo dei Cinque Fratelli, who had all been present at Augusta Penrhu's death. The breakfast waiter had disappeared without leaving an address; so he had to be eliminated from the assets that counted towards victory for the Trevelyans.

Charles was rather silent. He knew that Mr. Gavin mistrusted his capacity to deal with Probate work; and that throughout, his behaviour was being closely and ironically watched. He was sufficiently experienced not to be rendered nervous by this, but he could not help wishing that the case had been slightly more impersonal. Considering the more intimate case of Charles v. Loveday: Their Past, more than a fragment of absurdity lay in his formal reception of her now.

—For Nigel-the-Clerk had just announced that Mrs. and Miss Trevelyan had arrived, and should he show them in?

"Yes, yes, Nigel. At once."

—Would she, for instance, laugh at all this pompous but necessary array of morning-coat, piled-up briefs, Mr. Gavin, row of chairs? He was "getting himself" all the time, but Loveday might so easily do him an injustice, over this. Would her slanting eyes, her mocking eyes, challenge him to remember their mutual past, and laugh as well? For Debonair, he was sure, had no respect for time nor office. This was emphatically not the moment for laughter. Charles hardened, in expectation. . . . Damn it! *She* had called him in to look after her affairs—well, her mother's affairs. . . .

He rose, and shook hands with Laura Trevelyan, as Mr. Gavin introduced her, and then Loveday, to their counsel.

"I think, Mrs. Trevelyan, that you told me that you had not yet met Mr. Elvaston?"

"How do you do?" said a very serious Charles. ("My God!")

"And Miss Trevelyan, Mr. Elvaston."

Laura Trevelyan interposed brightly: "Oh, dear me, no

need to introduce *them*. These two children know each other quite well!"

"Indeed? I wasn't aware. . . ." Mr. Gavin was mellow, but suspicious.

One of the two children, Charles, looking, if anything, taller and more sombre than ever, did not lose his head. "Yes, I have had the pleasure. Last year, in London." Inwardly, he felt a sudden spasm of hatred for Mrs. Trevelyan; a desire that she should be punished by the loss of her case on the morrow. Then he remembered that such a desire was not compatible with his position as Mrs. Trevelyan's counsel.

"Yes," Loveday assented in a small subdued voice; "we have met."

Charles was sure that she was stifling laughter. Charles frowned. He did not feel in the least inclined to laugh, so why should Loveday?

But he had misjudged the effect of himself so awfully arrayed, sitting in authority among his paraphernalia. Loveday, the modern girl, sophisticated, flippant, was by now thoroughly intimidated. This awe-inspiring Mr. Elvaston in a morning coat. . . . Impossible that this should be the same bad-tempered savage who had driven her headlong through the dark, from Holland Park to Marlborough, last week, barking out proposals of marriage that were practically indistinguishable from a string of oaths! She hoped that she would be guilty of no incorrectitude of behaviour; nor Mummy either. She hoped that Charles would be lenient, and forgive them, if they were. She did not look at Charles above his collar and his dark grey tie. She was glad that she was wearing grey herself: plain well-tailored grey flannel coat and skirt, and an austere felt hat from Henry Heath of Piccadilly. It was a relief to be inconspicuous when a man sat in office and adjudicated. She sat down decorously on one of the Chippendale chairs, and wondered if they were going to offer Mummy a glass of port? Apparently not. She had thought all lawyers produced glasses of port.

Charles picked up a brief of their case, and ran his eye down the lines again.

Nigel entered with further information.

"Yes. Show them in."

Herr Gerstemunde, looking like a cartoon of an amiable German before the Great War, was shown in. And his wife, in plaid. Mr. Gavin introduced them to Charles. Charles shook hands.

"It gifs me gijantic pleasure," said the German. And it did. For he had been of necessity heavily paid for this trip to England, and he loved England very much, so that it really had been a stroke of good fortune that he had driven past the hotel in Porto Rinaldo at the moment when Miss Penrhu was about to make her last Will and Testament. "My vife." Herr and Frau Gerstemunde sat down on the chairs indicated. After a short pause they were followed by Dr. Severn, with his usual eccentric motions of the head that suggested a walrus snapping at little fishes in mid-air; and by the *padrona* of the Cinque Fratelli. They all seated themselves in a semicircle. Once again heavy silence filled the room. Mr. Gavin looked expectantly towards Charles, who decided to stride into the very middle of the matter on hand.

"You've known Miss Penrhu for a good many years, I gather, Mrs. Trevelyan?"

Laura Trevelyan rushed out a volume of explanation. She, unlike her daughter, was not in the least intimidated by the lack of geniality in the atmosphere of the Temple. The fact that she—thus she settled it in her mind—was employing Charles, was his patron, in fact, gave her an undeniable advantage. She was conferring a favour. Poor fellow, he must have been glad to get her brief. A young barrister needed encouragement. But if his joints did not give satisfaction—for very much in the same way she decided with which butcher she would place her custom!—if his beef were tough and his mutton stringy, she would remove her custom elsewhere. This was Mrs. Trevelyan's attitude towards Charles. She might have

been more prone to remember him as an exceedingly rich man and a possible son-in-law had he not been working for a living. There, positively, sitting at a table and working for it!

. . . "I was at school with Augusta. We were only third cousins, and I didn't see much of the rest of the family because they always made themselves so unpleasant. In fact, I hardly know the brother who is making all this unnecessary fuss now. Though that may be largely his wife. I believe he married beneath him. But poor Augusta and I were always very good friends indeed. We lost sight of each other for years, and then met again in the most curious way in Baker Street: I was crossing the road, and she was on the island . . ."

"Yes, yes, yes. Quite. I see," Charles interrupted. Already he was confirmed in his preliminary idea of exactly what sort of witness this Mrs. Trevelyan was likely to prove, on the morrow.

"I thought," Mrs. Trevelyan gently reproved him, "I have always understood that it helps one's lawyer to be in possession of *all* the facts. I am simply trying to tell you everything without reservation, Mr. Elvaston, because there's no need, is there, for the case to drag on for hours if it can be settled in a few minutes?"

Charles allowed himself a grave smile. "I think we shall have to allow the proceedings to take their usual course. You understand, Mrs. Trevelyan, that you are our principal witness, and that you will be cross-examined tomorrow, by Quigley, K. C., who is the counsel for the opposing party; a very formidable cross-examiner. Now, I am going to put the sort of questions to you that he may be likely to put, so that you will be prepared. You have had your proofs, of course?" Again he ran his eye down the strip of paper he held. "Yes, yes." His voice took on the pseudo-inflexion of a bully: "I gather that you went out to join Miss Penrhu in the summer. *Why* did you go out to Porto Rinaldo, Mrs. Trevelyan? What was your motive?"

Mrs. Trevelyan bridled: "Motive? I had no motive. Augusta wanted me to be with her. She hadn't many friends, be-

cause of that rather rude manner of hers, though I've told her often enough that people are very liable to mistake it and to think that she is being unpleasant when she's only being herself. 'It isn't as though you could afford to make yourself unpleasant, Augusta,' I used to say to her over and over again; 'and you must allow me to speak what is in my mind, because I'm older than you. But what I mean is that, being a spinster, you can't allow yourself so much license as if you were a married woman—'"

"I see. Yes. Then am I to take it, Mrs. Trevelyan, that Miss Penrhu was *not* a woman who had a very strong character? In other words, she allowed herself to be domineered over to some extent, influenced by her great friends?"

"Dear Mr. Elvaston, I never domineer. What an idea!"

Charles ceased being *pro tem* Quigley, K. C., trying to establish, on the defendant's behalf, the notion that Mrs. Trevelyan had used undue influence over her gentle, docile friend, a poor dying old lady in a foreign country. Undoubtedly, Quigley would take that line. He must explain this to Mrs. Trevelyan, if only she were mentally capable of receiving explanation, which he doubted. "You see, Mrs. Trevelyan, the arguments that they are likely to bring are three. One: that Miss Penrhu, at the time of her death, was not in a sound state of mind or body to make a will. Two: that the will was not properly executed; in other words, the signatures are hardly decipherable, and so forth. And three—" Charles spoke slowly and incisively, to let it sink in—"and probably the one that he is the most likely to stress—I can't tell, of course!—that you had used undue influence—"

Outburst from Mrs. Trevelyan.

"Yes, yes, yes. I know. I know. I'm on your side, Mrs. Trevelyan; but we must anticipate, for our own sakes. I take it, then, that Miss Penrhu, being a naturally brisk and determined nature, was never in the slightest degree moved by the advice of any other people whatever; that you had not the slightest influence over her?"

"But I *had!* I had the greatest influence over poor Augusta!"

Charles sighed, and exchanged a swift glance with Mr. Gavin.

—"Great influence! Only I never chose to take advantage of it. Indeed no. I can't bear this most unfair suggestion that my daughter and myself are a pair of adventuresses."

"The jury—" began Charles, patiently.

"The jury? How dare they! A lot of common men! They didn't know poor Augusta, and I did. I nursed her devotedly, and with absolutely no idea of reward. I nursed her simply because there was no one else to do it. Her family didn't bother about her at all—"

"Ah, I gather, Mrs. Trevelyan, that you do not like Major Penrhu?"

Another outburst from Mrs. Trevelyan.

"Quite. Yes, quite. As you say, his sister was ill for six weeks—was it six weeks?" consulting the brief. "And nothing would have been done for her if you hadn't been there? Exactly. Now, had there been to your knowledge any definite quarrel between Miss Penrhu and her nearest relations? Her brother?"

"No, not a definite quarrel. I expect they knew that she had money to leave."

"Hush, please, Mrs. Trevelyan. You mustn't, really, suggest—"

"I don't see why Major Penrhu should do all the suggesting. He married for money. A detestable man, I've often told Augusta."

"I was right, then," dryly, from Charles. "You do not like Major Penrhu?"

"I like very few people, Mr. Elvaston; but those I do, I like very much indeed. When I once take a fancy—"

"Yes, yes. Thank you, Mrs. Trevelyan." Charles consulted his watch. "But I have a very short time at my disposal, and—" He had given her up as hopeless. She seemed determined to damage her own case; perfectly unable to take any

suggestion, or follow any coherent or helpful line of reply. Rather wearily he turned to Loveday, who had been sitting, throughout her mother's exhibition, with that haughty expression on her delicate face which always appeared when she was most appalled or frightened, as she was now. Mummy! . . . If only Mummy wouldn't. God! What was Charles thinking? Why had she got to go through all this? . . . And Mummy had really been so absolutely splendid, so brave and unselfish, in nursing Cousin Augusta; but nobody would believe it, hearing her make such an utter ass of herself!

"Miss Trevelyan—" Charles was addressing her, now; looking in her direction, but very carefully not *at* her. "Miss Trevelyan—"

Loveday jumped up as though she were at school . . . and then suddenly sat down again. With a terrific effort she succeeded in gaining control of her brain and memory, which felt as though they had been exploded into a thousand fragments. Quietly and clearly she answered Charles' questions, giving her account of the making of the Will, and of Augusta Penrhu's death.

"Oh, but—" cried Mrs. Trevelyan; and "How could you, Loveday! Absurd!" and "No, not in the least like that!" and "What happened was—" and "Loveday, I cannot allow you—" and "After all, you weren't there all the time, and I was!"

"*Please*, Mrs. Trevelyan!" Charles spoke with authority; rather like quiet thunder, Loveday thought, admiring him. "Please. I really can *not* allow you to interrupt while I am conducting this interrogation." And actually he quelled her for a few moments.

Loveday's evidence proved wholly satisfying to the young counsel for the plaintiff. Charles saw at once that their best chance lay here. He could not decide, however, whether to call her first, and let her make her impression on the jury; or to call her after Mrs. Trevelyan's quite obviously demoralizing presence in the witness-box, and let Loveday act as a healing balm.

"Thank you. Thank you. That's excellent. I needn't trouble you any more."

Dr. Severn supplied his professional statements as regards Miss Penrhu's perfectly sound state of mind at the time when she made the will. The Germans and the Signora of the Cinque Fratelli corroborated this. Charles wished, a trifle irritably, that they had had the sense at the time to call in from the street two witnesses of the Allied nations, instead of introducing an unnecessarily Teutonic element to prejudice a patriotic British jury. However, that could not be helped. Mrs. Trevelyan had a fairly strong case, but . . .

After he had taken leave of them all, with some final encouragement, more reserved than hearty, as to the next day's proceedings, Charles turned towards Mr. Gavin, whose quizzical glance said: "I am sorry for you, young man!" and, at the same time: "But if poor Hughes hadn't been drowned, and if a second choice had been left to me . . ."

"Well," remarked Charles, resigned. "I should say it was as good as lost, wouldn't you? After all, the Penrhus have got Mrs. Trevelyan on their side . . ."

To Loveday's amazement, Mrs. Trevelyan was beaming, as they got outside into the quiet shady pavements of the Temple.

"I like him very much indeed, Loveday. He's quite charming, and *so* good-looking! And devoted to his mother, I think you told me? I can quite believe that." She was silent for a minute or two, thinking deeply. "But I must say, I think he might have invited us to dinner tomorrow night, just to celebrate. It would have been only polite, considering that I recommended him for my brief!"

CHAPTER VI

VÆ VICTIS

—He had to speak to her, though it was difficult to know what to say. "I'm sorry!" And then again, seeing how white she was, how shadowy beneath the eyes: "I'm so sorry, Loveday."

Loveday dropped behind the others. She did not want her mother to see Charles, just at this moment. In her terribly excited condition she might be capable of saying anything; of blaming him for the fiasco. All the courts had just risen, and the corridor that overhung the Gothic great hall was crowded. People were rushing to and fro: barristers, barristers' clerks, witnesses, spectators. . . . It was half past one, and everybody wanted lunch. Charles drew Loveday aside from the jostle. They leant over the balustrade of one of the small outjutting balconies over the hall. Above them the vaulted roof gave back an echo of the trampling of feet, the chatter and boom of voices.

"It wasn't *your* fault," murmured Loveday. "Your speech was marvellous. It was—it was Mummy."

Charles nodded in sympathy. Most distinctly and beyond all possibility of contradiction, it was Mrs. Trevelyan who had been responsible for the judge's antagonistic summing-up, which led to a verdict against the Will.

"I'm sorry," he repeated, a third time. Loveday was mute. Her head drooped. If he had seemed strange to her in his own chambers, and wearing a morning-coat, how much stranger now, in wig and gown, and in these nightmare corridors! She remembered how once, long ago, she had tried to divert her thoughts from Augusta's death-bed, by mentally creating improbable links between the people stationed at various outlying portions of her life.

. . . In the witness-box . . . and Charles examining her . . . about Cousin Augusta's death. She had imagined nothing as wildly fantastic as this!

"Did it appear to you, Miss Trevelyan, that your mother exercised much influence over her cousin?"

Protest from Quigley, K. C.: "My lord, I object. This is a matter of opinion!"

And Charles altered the form of his question: "Do you remember hearing anything which had bearing on your mother's influence over her cousin, in any way?"

Loveday was quick. And she understood Charles so well. Even now, across a crowded court, and with everybody listening intently, she was still conscious that their old intimacy held; that it was still alive, and thrilled from him to her, telling her just what he wanted, and *why* he had altered the form of his question. "I remember my Cousin Augusta used to say to me often when we were alone together: 'Loveday, I'd no more think of listening to your mother's advice than I would to my cat's! Less, in fact. The woman's a fool!' "

A shout of laughter in court, silenced at once by the ushers. Mrs. Trevelyan, furious with her daughter, burst out: "My lord! Loveday, how dare you! This—"

"Sit down! Sit down!"

Mr. Gavin was seen struggling with her. . . .

"I shall have to pay for this!" reflected Loveday, ruefully; but it was worth any future scoldings, for the effect it obviously had upon the jury. If Miss Penrhu were that sort of strong-minded woman, and had that sort of opinion of Laura Trevelyan—an opinion which they all shared . . . The defendant's attempt to establish a plea of undue influence grew visibly paler.

And then, again on a cross-current, Charles' private knowledge of Loveday, his confidence in her vivid gift of narrative, had been no less powerfully useful. "I want you to tell the judge in your own words, Miss Trevelyan, what occurred at the death of the late Miss Penrhu." . . . How often he had lain back in his armchair, listening to Debonair's talk, and wondering lazily just what it was, that indefinable tang and flavour, in all that tumbled from her lips! And here in the High Court of Justice, in full public, she did not lose it. He noticed

with satisfaction that Quigley was not loving her. Quigley, on the other hand, had adored Mrs. Trevelyan—who really had given him very little to do except gently prod her from time to time, and then gently display her suicidal disasters to the judge and jury.

But Loveday was a different matter, when he rose to cross-examine her. "Your mother showed a great deal of anxiety, no doubt, Miss Trevelyan, that Miss Penrhu should be brought round again, after she had become unconscious, so as to be able to sign the Will?"

Loveday replied: "On the contrary, everyone else in the room was showing the utmost anxiety that the Will should be signed, and my mother was the only one who didn't. When they kept on trying to force the pencil into Cousin Augusta's hand, my mother said: 'That is enough!' "

Quigley pounced. "Ah, she said: 'That is enough'? She meant: 'The Will is already signed, so there is no more to do'?"

"No. She did not mean that. She knew quite well that the Will had not yet been signed."

"How do you know that she knew?"

"She told me so, after the Will had been made and while my cousin was still unconscious."

"Oh. And she seemed disappointed?"

"Not in the least. She accepted the fact perfectly calmly. She didn't expect that Cousin Augusta would come round again."

"At what time was this?"

Loveday replied, calmly: "I haven't the faintest idea!"

Quigley pounced again. " 'Haven't the faintest idea'? You *must* know what time it was, approximately. Come, come, try and refresh your memory."

A serious and innocent Loveday said: "Mr. Quigley, if you were watching somebody die for the first time in your life, slowly, and in pain, and you had never seen death before, would you be conscious of the time, or of anything else?"

She could not have found a more dramatic rebuke. In her turn, she was rebuked by the judge for asking a question of the counsel; but kindly, and only as a formality. As for the jury, each one was thinking of the first time that he or she had seen death. . . .

The professional side of Charles was shouting silently: "Well done! Well done!" with schoolboy exultation that Quigley, that noted bully, that large, red, successful, self-satisfied creature, should have been for a moment so beautifully vanquished. And: "You darling!" whispered the Charles that was her lover. "Oh, you darling!" . . .

If anything could have saved their case, at this stage, Loveday's evidence would have done so. Actually it was too late. Mrs. Trevelyan had already wrought chaos and devastation; she had thoroughly upset the judge and had inclined him to favour the Penrhus. From her very first utterance in the witness-box to her last she spoke nothing but sincere truth. Yet directly Charles heard Quigley say, in that unctuous plausible way of his: "Do yourself justice, Mrs. Trevelyan! . . . Now come, Mrs. Trevelyan, I *want* you to do yourself justice over this. I'm sure you can!" . . . he knew that Quigley was certain of his verdict. Mrs. Trevelyan, of course, thought that Quigley was a common brute; that the judge was prejudiced—bribed, perhaps! you never know, these days!—and that the jury were a lot of imbeciles who did not know the truth when they heard it. She was wildly over-excited, indignant, and voluble, and made no attempt to hide these opinions of hers; they were naturally bound to be unpopular. Nor would she submit herself in the least to the discipline of the court. Her motto for the day might have been: "My head is bloody, but unbowed." . . . Mr. Justice Challiser did not like being glared at. He settled it at once with himself that this was a very disagreeable and arrogant old woman; and that if Miss Penrhu were indeed unduly influenced in the hour of her death, to make a Will in favour of Mrs. Trevelyan, then Miss Penrhu might quite well have been of unsound mind. He listened to Quigley's cross-examination:

"Did it occur to you, Mrs. Trevelyan, that Miss Penrhu was quite herself, in her last hours?"

"Of course she wasn't herself! She was dying! You can't expect people to be themselves when they are dying, can you?"

"You admit, then, that she was *not* herself?"

"I've never heard such a silly question in my life!" cried Mrs. Trevelyan.

The judge asked her not to criticize the counsel's questions, but to answer them.

The cross-examination went on: "Of course, Mrs. Trevelyan, you never suggested to your cousin that she should make a Will?"

"Indeed I did. I frequently told her that she ought to make a Will. My poor husband—he's dead now, but he was a colonel in the Indian army, he said that everyone should make a Will, and leave his affairs in order. And I quite agree with him. I don't believe in people leaving things in a muddle for other people to have to put right for them!"

"Did you suggest what form the Will should take? Did it occur to you that money that has come from a family should go back to it?"

Mrs. Trevelyan remarked that the Penrhus had plenty of their own.

"Ah, you do not like Major Penrhu?" Quigley purred delightedly.

Charles, who by now would have been surprised at nothing from his obstreperous client, waited for her to inform Quigley: "That's exactly what Mr. Elvaston told me you were going to ask me!"

However, he was spared that. She was too engrossed in preparing a rope for her neck, and in adjusting it nicely so as to give Quigley, K. C., the minimum amount of trouble: "Her relations never did a thing for her, and naturally my cousin resented it. She said to me often and often: 'Laura, I always did dislike Henry. He thinks too much of himself; and as for that woman he married, she makes me feel sick!' "

"And can you remember when she said this, Mrs. Trevelyan?"

"I can!" triumphantly. "It was when she first got influenza, and just before it turned to pneumonia. All the same, she was already very ill, because influenza on the Riviera can be a serious thing. And Augusta was run down from not spending enough on good nourishing food. She hated spending money. So I naturally urged her to send for her relatives to nurse her; but when I saw how she was against it, I said: 'Well, if that's the case, and if it's only going to send up your temperature, don't pay any more attention to them, Augusta. *I* can nurse you.'"

Quigley moved his lips like scissors about to clash: "And was it shortly afterwards that you first suggested that she should make her Will?"

Loveday trembled. She prayed that Mummy might realize the danger. . .

"Indeed it was!" said Mrs. Trevelyan. And Charles' left hand slowly unclenched. He knew when a case was lost. "Indeed it was! Very shortly after that. Seeing how ill she was getting, I was anxious that nothing should happen before she made her Will and settled her affairs. I was astonished to hear that she hadn't. People *ought* to make a Will. My husband said so." For this was one of Mrs. Trevelyan's obsessions, firmly fixed in her mind by her husband, for whose opinions she had the right sort of respect-without-intelligence.

The judge, in his summing-up, stressed her fatal admission. He ruffled back the pages of his note-book, and recalled to the minds of the jury that Mrs. Trevelyan had owned that the first occasion on which she had suggested to Miss Penrhu that she should make her Will had been directly after she had advised Miss Penrhu to pay no more attention to her relatives.

The jury were not absent for more than ten minutes. They returned a verdict to the affect that the signature was in good order—they could hardly do otherwise, in view of the evidence of Dr. Severn and the Germans and the proprietress of the

Cinque Fratelli. In good order. But Miss Penrhu had been submitted to undue influence previous to effecting it.

"My lord—" cried Mrs. Trevelyan, in despair.

Again she was hushed.

Quigley, K. C., suggested that Mrs. Trevelyan should be made to pay costs, instead of letting them come out of the estate. Charles protested. The judge was at first inclined to give in to Quigley; but then it occurred to him that possibly he had allowed himself to become annoyed by the behaviour of a rather silly, ignorant old woman, and that he might perhaps take a little time to think it over, calmly. He postponed the question of costs. The court rose.

. . . Mr. Gavin said to Mrs. Trevelyan: "It is half-past one. You and Miss Trevelyan had better come downstairs and have some lunch with me."

. . . "I MUST run after Mummy," said Loveday to Charles. "She—I don't know—she may be saying anything, if I'm not there. Good-bye, and thank you ever so much." She held out her hand. Charles took it. Had they ever shaken hands before? Loveday believed not. Well—that was all. They were not likely to meet again. He had done his best for them. The name of Trevelyan would probably always be associated in his mind with infernal nuisance. "I'm sorry," said Loveday, pitifully, and at random. It seemed all that they were able to say to each other, in this weird little interlude snatched between one nightmare and the next.

"I'm sorry, too," said Charles.

Then she disappeared among the crowd streaming down the various staircases to the crypt beyond the great hall.

Asking for direction as she went, Loveday presently found herself pushing open heavy swing-doors that led into a dim underground, artificially lit, swarming with meaningless shadows that scuttled here and there on mysterious errands, all in a hurry. Searching for her mother, she ran blindly through a long goblin room, where, at a buffet along the side, barristers' clerks were treating solicitors' clerks to drinks, in the hope of

securing custom for their masters, all to come out of the petty cash. This must be the wrong room. Mummy couldn't be here! . . . Loveday turned and ran back again. She was oppressed by a horror of everything that had happened to her today, and was still happening. The goblin clerks turned and stared at her, this girl who was so tall and slim and golden. On the other side of the swing-doors: "Please, where would people be lunching?" she gasped incoherently, to the first creature she met in the semi-darkness. He was in a hurry, so he silently pointed at the doors through which she had just passed in, and out again. Loveday ran wildly back into the room of the goblin clerks . . . through the further swing-doors. . . . Figures rushing to and fro, some of them freakishly clad in wig and gown, laughing, talking, calling to each other . . . the clank of china and cutlery . . . a long passageway lined with tables, and doors opening and shutting on either side, showing glimpses of gloomy rooms where other sinister groups were snatching a hasty lunch. . . . Loveday put her hand to her head. Would she have to search through all these before she found her mother, and before she would be allowed to climb to the upper air again?

. . . Then she heard her name called, and saw Mrs. Trevelyan and Mr. Gavin lunching at one of the tables not far from where she stood bewildered. Not a very well-chosen spot, for the Penrhus and their party were seated two tables away, and were being rather loud and merry. Major Penrhu, in the main, was not a bad man, but he had won his case, and he had already had a couple of stiff whiskies in celebration. Lamb-Bird kept on casting furious glances in his direction, and making remarks which she obviously intended him to hear. She was very flushed; her eyes were round and hard and blue; her hair rushed up in a defiant whoosh from the nape of her neck.

"I should have thought, if money had come to me that didn't belong to me, and never was meant to, that the least I could do was not to brag about it. . . ."

"Oh, Mummy, *please* don't!" This was Loveday.

And Major Penrhu laughed, boisterously. It might have been at Mrs. Trevelyan, or at some joke of his own.

Laura turned on her daughter. "Yes. And *you* are a good person to say: 'Mummy, please don't!' I shouldn't be a bit surprised if it was your telling the judge that your own mother was a fool that made us lose the case. How dare you!"

Mr. Gavin intimated, suavely, that what Loveday had reported of Miss Penrhu's independent and vigorous state of mind was the most valuable piece of evidence produced in their favour.

"Yes. I dare say it would have been," cried Mrs. Trevelyan, half-sobbing, but fortified from complete breakdown by the brandy and soda recommended by her host. "I dare say it would have been, if the judge hadn't been prejudiced. I expect they got at him beforehand. For all I know, he may be a friend of Henry Penrhu. He simply didn't listen to our side at all. I watched him while that Elvaston man of yours was making a speech. Not a very good speech, I thought."

. . . Charles hurried down the broad passage-way between the tables, towards the far room, where the barristers lunched. He did not see the Trevelyans and Mr. Gavin, but passed like the other swiftly hurrying figures, fantastic in wig and gown.

Loveday saw him.

Mr. Gavin intimated, in defence of "that Elvaston man of his," that, in the first place, Mr. Elvaston had not been *his* selection for a counsel; in fact, at the time, he had thought that Mrs. Trevelyan was making a mistake, and that she should have selected someone more accustomed to Probate work. But, in the second place, he was bound to admit that Mr. Elvaston had conducted the case very well indeed; his speech for the plaintiffs had been surprising in its excellence.

"That's all very well," cried Mrs. Trevelyan, in whom shock had promoted that state of agonized irritation which cannot bear to be without a temporary scapegoat. "That's all very well, but what I say is this: that you can't afford to be a gentleman when other people are behaving like scavengers. Yes, scavengers!" she repeated, at the Penrhus. "I've never heard of such

a disgusting thing in my life as actually sending out to Porto Rinaldo to scrape up all the lies they can, from that cat, Carrie North, who always hated me, and always hated poor Augusta!"

Mr. Gavin intimated that such collection of evidence was the usual procedure.

"Usual or not, *I* wouldn't have done it. *I* didn't send anyone to Cornwall, did I, to rake up scandals about Henry Penrhu's wife? Though I haven't any doubt that I could have found as many as I wanted, and plenty more! And I should like to know what it had to do with Miss Carrie North that I had chosen to send my daughter as much as possible up to the tennis club, while Augusta was ill. She's never likely to have a daughter herself, anyone can tell by just looking at her. . . . It wasn't that I wanted Loveday out of the way, as she suggested; I wanted her to get fresh air and exercise. And that Augusta had refused to pay her debts in Porto Rinaldo directly she became ill. . . . And that there was a picture of a girl on a champagne cork above Augusta's bed! She only pushed her way into the bedroom once, I saw to that. It was all spite, because I refused her admittance. Naturally I did, when I was in charge! I had to keep my patient quiet. And Augusta couldn't bear Carrie North!"

Mr. Gavin intimated that the opposing party were glad to acquire any form of proof that Miss Penrhu might have been of unsound mind.

"She'd have been of more unsound mind if I'd let Carrie North into the room!" Laura argued, vehemently. "But I'm never going to justice again. I'm quite alone in the world, and everyone's my enemy, and they're all glad that I should be robbed of the legacy that's rightfully mine, and which nobody tried to get for me except in the most half-hearted manner."

Mr. Gavin was roused by this implied blame out of his bland philosophy. He ceased to "intimate," but told Laura plainly that she and no one else was responsible for the verdict against her. He told her exactly what portion of her evidence

had, so to speak, done the trick. He told her—but rather more subtly now, in recovery of his natural sense of discretion, with a client—that they had had a good case, at the beginning; and but for her overwhelming arrogance and truculent habit of dispute, it might easily have been they, and not the Penrhus, having a merry luncheon. . . .

". . . In Hades!" whispered Loveday. And— "Mayn't we go up, now?" she pleaded.

Mrs. Trevelyan sobbed: "That's right, trying to drag me away, even when I'm enjoying myself. . . ."

CHAPTER VII

THE AGE OF CHIVALRY

"DON'T hang about here, making me nervous. Go to your own room," Mrs. Trevelyan bade Loveday, when they returned to the hotel in Holland Park, after lunching with Mr. Gavin.

Loveday obediently went away. On thinking it over, she came back, a minute later, and found, as she expected, that her mother had collapsed into heart-broken weeping. . . .

"Mummy. Mummy darling! Don't! It doesn't matter. We're no worse off now than before there was any idea of Augusta's legacy. Mummy! . . . Lamb-Bird, don't!"

"Costs!" wailed Laura Trevelyan. "Costs! They may charge anything; we shall never be able to afford to pay. That judge postponed it so that he could think of a lot more to add on!"

"Oh, I don't know. He wasn't so bad. Perhaps he'll let us off costs altogether. Mummy darling, I do wish you wouldn't make yourself so unhappy over losing the case."

"But I shall lose you, too!" And out streamed what was at the source of Mrs. Trevelyan's misery and dread. "You'll leave me. I've nothing to keep you with. Nothing. And I'd planned— Oh, what's the use of telling you, now?"

"Tell me," whispered Loveday. She squatted down beside the low sofa, but her arms reached up and held her mother warmly embraced. . . . It was almost unbearable to listen, while Laura Trevelyan tumbled out a pitiful chaos of all the happy, futile dreams by which she had meant to tempt her only daughter not to leave her, but to remain with her mother and be happy: of the house in Phillimore Terrace; the sitting-room for Loveday and her friends, with Mummy as an oft-welcomed guest; the ball which was to have been such a success; the piles and piles of pretty, dainty clothes, and the maid to keep them in

good order; and, most bewailed of all, believing it would have proved her supreme success with Loveday, of the smart little two-seater car, because she was so broad-minded, and realized that her daughter was a Modern Girl. . . .

So these had been Mummy's plans, during those hot silent weeks in the flat at Porto Rinaldo. Loveday had often wondered then what were her mother's methods of secretly comforting herself; why she so often went about, humming; whence all the odd little smiles arose, since there was nothing in their outer lives, just then, that could have caused a smile. . . . "God! She was thinking of things for me, all the time! She *is* an unselfish one! And whenever I made plans, I used to leave her out of them, in case she should be a holy nuisance!"

But Laura Trevelyan had no notion of exploiting her generous intentions in the hope that they might appeal to Loveday's sense of pathos. She was beyond that. Sincerely she believed that she had now lost Loveday, for she could give her no presents. Her bitter disappointment had smitten her down to the realms where pretence and self-delusion ceased to be of any help whatsoever. . . .

"You're so brilliant and popular, and everybody wants you, so that when we are together, they sometimes seem as though they wanted me too. But without you, I'm just a boring old woman. No, it's no good contradicting me, Loveday. I am. I know it, really. I don't make friends; it's you that people want. And when they see us together, they say: 'Mother and daughter! English! Charming people!' Not that I care whether they say it or not, because I always find that you're enough company for me, without strangers. But when I'm alone, people won't bother. Just another old woman, not very interesting, and nothing much to talk about! Yet why should you stop with me? What possible pleasure can it be for you? I've always bullied you, and asked too many questions. A mother has no real claims. We think we ought to have, but we haven't. If you want to go, what can I do? I can't afford to give you a good time now, with these costs to pay. The costs of the case will be enormous. And all for nothing! All wasted. That's my

own fault. I oughtn't to have brought the case. I ought to have let the legacy go, as I first meant to. It would have been *right*. . . . I wasn't nursing poor Augusta for the sake of reward. But then I hoped—you were getting restless and discontented, and your friend Judith came along and fetched you . . . Oh, I know, I know, darling, I shouldn't have been rude to Judith, or spoken to her like that, under my roof. But you don't know what it's like to want to keep someone always with you, and just when you think you have managed it by trying everything, someone younger and more amusing comes along and takes them. And Judith can afford to be more lighthearted; it all doesn't matter so much, to her. One is so attractive when one has no worries. Do you think that I hadn't understood why you would rather be enjoying yourself at Lagnello than trotting about with me, getting scolded? But, Loveday, I hadn't meant to scold you as much as I did. It all boils up, sometimes, when I'm not feeling well. You're always so sweet to me when I'm feeling ill. And now there will be no one, except, if it gets too bad, I'll have to pay for somebody. Oh, I wish I were dead! What's the good of me? I'll go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Yes, I will. Don't contradict. I *must* do it! I'll dress as a nun and go on a pilgrimage. As a penance for being ready to accept rewards for nursing Augusta. . . .

"It's all my own fault. You heard what that lawyer said, that dreadful old man who gave us lunch? He said that it was my evidence which lost us the case. If I'd been wiser, if I hadn't got so angry with them all for being stupid and suspicious, and not believing me when I told the truth, if I'd controlled myself, I should have been able to give you what a mother ought to be able to give her daughter, a nice house and good clothes. I've spoilt your chances. You'll get on better without me.

"Darling, I haven't been as cross as I've seemed to be. That time when you left me to go to Lagnello, you were quite right. But Judith never let you alone; she never gave me a chance. I couldn't let you run into every sort of danger. I knew the

world; at least, I thought I knew it. I had to safeguard you, and sometimes not let you do things you wanted to. You had no father, and you were so wild! People talked. It was easy for Judith Maitland; she wasn't your mother; she had no responsibility. And when you left me, to go to her— But now, you'll leave me again, and not come back so soon.

"It might have been different if I'd controlled myself, today in court. Father Delaney was right: one must be humble. I haven't been humble enough. . . ."

For the first time in her life she had made a confession which was unsparing to herself; an ultimate confession, without palliative or reservation. And it had exhausted her, so that she wept quietly and had no more strength for clamorous grief.

Her daughter was beside her for the moment, and that was consolation, but it could not last much longer. Her daughter would go from her, whither she would not be able to follow. . . .

But Loveday's understanding was swift and chivalrous. Just because there was now no money, no hope of extra luxuries to hold her, she would have to stay. An arrogant mother reinforced by victory and an additional eight hundred a year would have been so much easier to desert. If Mummy had won the case, Loveday had planned to go. But Mummy had lost, and had thrown herself helplessly and in fear upon Loveday's mercy. Well, then, after all, perhaps they might be better companions in the future? So Loveday had once exultantly planned it, at Porto Rinaldo, after she had returned from her disastrous visit to Judith, and, of a strange impulse, had poured out *mea culpa* to her mother. Better companions, even though they were mother and daughter. For if never again, by Loveday's reliance on her mother, could they be friends, yet perhaps now . . . soon . . . some day . . . by her mother's reliance upon Loveday.

Anyhow, Mummy must at once be comforted and protected. "Mummy, dearest, *darling*, of course I'm not going to whoosh off. What an absolutely too ridiculous notion! Where

should I go? I'd hate to leave you. I'd be an absolutely lost one. Mummy sweet, you're simply not to cry any more. We're going to have lovely lays together. Much nicer than it's ever been. Truly, truly. Leave it to me. Loveday the Eleventh, known as The Resourceful! I'm bursting with all sorts of too marvellous ideas. Mummy!"

. . . Gradually Mrs. Trevelyan allowed herself to be coaxed back to a tremulous cheerfulness. Was Loveday really going to stay? And in spite of her mother's having lost the case by her own silly fault? It was too good to be true. . . . But it *was* true! . . . Panic ebbed away, the panic of being such a dull, scolding old woman that even her daughter could not bear to live with her. For Loveday apparently *liked* living with her. . . .

"You've been exaggerating, Mummy. Oh, we've had a few bright-black rows, but that's all finished. I know I've been quite appalling, sometimes, whizzing off to Judith, and all that, just when I ought to have been at home. And it's partly through me that we're so poor: that premium that went down the drain. . . ."

And her mother was so far recovered as to be able to reproach her, a little, for leaving Freya's studio without asking permission, and without completion of the training for which the money had already been paid.

"Yes, yes, Mummy, I know. But still, let's cut our losses. I'm rather fed up with London and Porto Rinaldo, aren't you? So what shall we do next?"

Mrs. Trevelyan tentatively suggested Smyrna . . . or California . . . or Bucharest. It appeared that she had always wanted to visit Bucharest. "They call it Little Paris, you know, Loveday. Little Paris. And quite cheap. I heard of an Englishwoman, of very good family, too, who went out to the Tonga Islands, and started a hotel there for the English, and made a lot of money. The Riviera's overdone; one has to find a new place. There's no reason at all, is there, why we shouldn't start a little hotel at Bucharest, if we find we like it? I was talking to Miss Baxter, here, and her brother is something to

do with digestive biscuits, and says it's quite easy to export them, keeping them fresh in air-tight tins or something, and I always think they're nicer with cheese than that heavy brown bread one gets abroad, though I didn't suppose, when she told me, how soon it might come in useful. . . ."

She was fairly happy, now; patting her daughter's hand; drinking the cup of tea that Loveday brought her; discussing their future journeyings, and expenditure, and what they would pack and not pack . . . with that mellow certainty, like a sunset benison upon all her landscape, that she would not be alone. Her daughter would be with her. Loveday had promised; indeed, Loveday had said that she preferred to be with her mother.

("God!" thought Loveday. "How am I ever going to stand it?")

The page brought her a telegram:

Please dine with me tonight 7:30 Maison de Provence. Meant to ask you this morning but somehow I didn't. Charles.

. . . Nevertheless, and in spite of the signature, that telegram was strange, coming from Charles; the wording unfamiliar, lacking his usual precision, lacking the touch of formality that lay athwart everything he did. It was almost the sort of impulsive telegram which Loveday herself might have phrased and dispatched.

She knew why he had asked her to dinner tonight. He was sorry for her. He had been prompted by a blend of pity and courtesy. "Decent of him," thought Loveday, with a shrug of the shoulders. . . . But you could always trust Charles to be decent.

"What is it, darling?" from Mrs. Trevelyan, on the sofa. "A telegram? Show it to me?" Loveday showed it to her. "But how nice, Loveday!"

"Very nice, Mummy; only I'm not going."

"Of course you're going. It will do you good to dine out, after such an unfortunate day. No, it's no good arguing that

you don't want to leave me. You've been with me all the afternoon, and I'm very tired; I'll have a little dinner in bed, and read that pretty book Miss Baxter lent me, and then go quietly off to sleep. After all, now the case is over, there's nothing more to lie awake and worry about, is there?"

Loveday felt too depleted, too listless, to care whether she went or not. It was easier to give in than to argue. Moving in a mechanical dream, she went up to her room on the second floor; bathed and dressed. She supposed Charles wanted to discuss the legal aspect of the case all over again. Lawyers always did . . . like bridge and golf. What did it matter? Nothing mattered.

. . . Not until she was in a taxi and already half-way between Holland Park and Dover Street, did it suddenly occur to her that she had put on, without noticing, the one dress which Charles, last winter, had perpetually declared his favourite. It was a Chanel model, exquisitely and supremely simple, in *café-au-lait* georgette; an overwrought spider might have spun the pleated skirt, a web of lace in exactly the same delicate fawn. Not even the large ragged chrysanthemum on her shoulder swerved by one shade from the graceful restraint of the whole scheme. Charles always called this frock the "Débutante at Ascot." Frequently, he had asked Loveday to wear it. . . .

"Hell! He'll think I've put it on on purpose to catch him, now that we've lost the case and I'm poor again. He'll think I'm repenting at having turned him down the other night! Hell! Why didn't I choose *any* other kit?" She ceased to visualize Charles any more in the helpful knightly aspect of yesterday evening and today; on the contrary, he was rich, triumphant, and despising her! Loveday recalled, with retrospective shoots of wrath, his insulting reasons for proposing marriage to her: "You won't ever see me on my knees again. There's not the faintest danger, not a shred, not a glimmer, that I shall ever feel that way about you!" . . . attacked her like a poison which was only now taking effect. He thought her rotten, he thought her cheap, he thought her mercenary, out for what she could grab. . . . And if he saw her so carefully arrayed

in the frock he liked best: "Yes, he *will*. . . . He'll think I've put it on because I look good form in it, a sort of patrician one, whom he wouldn't be ashamed to marry. Of course, and the very second he looks at me, he'll think it's another bait. I'm not going to put up with it!"

She leant out of the window and told the taxi-driver to take her back to Holland Park. Her fiery mood was a relief. She could bang about in it, and be a beast, and utterly impossible, and shake him to blazes. Fun! Amusing! Much more fun than sitting all demure and decorous at his condescending dinner, listening while he talked in legal jargon. This was going to be *her* evening, not his. Poor unsuspicious Charles, he had let himself in for it with a vengeance!

Loveday dashed up to her bedroom three steps at a time, tore off the Débutante-at-Ascot; and put on, instead, a wayward rag in scarlet, embroidered in eccentric clumps of purple and oyster pomegranates. . . . Not in the least like a débutante-at-anywhere.

"Might as well slosh on some make-up. I'm as white as dead cheese! I should think I'd be about an hour late. Still, he can wait. Darling Charles! He likes waiting! Especially when he's ordered dinner already."

Charles—so polite, punctual, and precise! Damn him, and damn him again for his offer of what she most longed for in the world . . . yet offering it without even loving her, and only because he had been in a black mood, when he had to humiliate somebody, to atone for his own humiliation.

. . . Loveday rummaged through her trunk till she found the silver coat, which had not yet been unpacked. She shook it out of its creases and swathed it round her.

Charles would remember the silver coat!

CHAPTER VIII

"A RAGAMUFFIN CLUE"

CHARLES was waiting at the entrance of the restaurant. He had been waiting for an hour and ten minutes, having arrived well before the hour appointed by himself, to order a very special dinner, and to select the appropriate wines to accompany it.

If Loveday had expected him to flinch at the brilliant spectacle of her scarlet lips and her silver coat, she was disappointed. Nor did he reproach her for being late, although he hated her habitually whimsical treatment of time. He might have been welcoming a great lady, not a culprit. Loveday felt as though her first effects had fallen rather flat, and decided to conduct her whole evening in obstreperous rebellion to his tastes and likings: "And then he can't possibly believe that I'm out to grab him, because he knows that I know what he hates!" Thus crudely she reasoned, in her vicious mood.

Charles had selected an isolated position for their table. The huge shaggy bronze chrysanthemums upon it were no less an offering to Loveday than the fastidious care in the choice of viands and drinks. His obvious wish to give her pleasure accentuated her perverse swing towards revolt, instead of diminishing it. She kept on her gleaming wrap, because she said she was cold, sitting so close to the window; and she was flippant at the expense of the very dry Amontillado with which he proposed starting the dinner, and the Avocado pears. . . .

"Advocate's food?—But I'm simply *fed* with everything to do with the law. You might have thought that I'd prefer to get right away from it. Your pears—whatever they are; I've never heard of them—they sound tough and wheezy, like the judge's neck today. . . . Or am I attacking one of your gods?

You rather run to gods, don't you? How hateful London is!—Ah well, I'll drink vodka and pretend I'm in Poland. Darling-angel Fritzie said that he would have taken me to Poland if I hadn't been so silly as to run away and leave him in Budapest. Vodka and caviare for me, and we'll drink to Fritzie von Tadelheim. He gave me this coat, you know!"

Charles assented, without a single crease in his charming humour. The pears, whose rare flavour and smooth buttery flesh he had thought would suit her perpetual craving for originality, were removed. They had caviare and vodka. *Sole véronique* was the next item on the menu. Loveday said that she could not possibly be expected to eat fish, after she had already had caviare . . . "You don't mind, Charles, do you?"—and she wondered how long Charles' temper would hold out. He ordered away the *sole véronique* which was ready, in favour of *œufs aurore*. After a blank six minutes, Loveday declared that she was *hungry*, and that it was already twenty to nine—and waited for his reminder of the hour and ten minutes that she had kept him waiting. No reminder came. So she scoffed at him for a patient and spineless St. Sebastian, and proceeded to hunt for more arrows. Not in the least reticent on the subject of their lost case, she furnished Charles with a list of remarkable ideas—in a joyous clear voice, audible to most of the other diners in the restaurant—by which she and her mother, practically beggars, whining mendicants, in fact, proposed to earn their living in the near future.

"And I put it to Mummy, Charles, that we might run a brothel in Bucharest. Mummy looks so a respectable, she ought to do well at it. And I could be a bewitching decoy, couldn't I? Mummy knows how special digestive biscuits can be sent out there, and that's a beginning. And, Charles, I know quite enough about brothels, don't I? Because I've led such a loose life; not by actual experience, but by what quee men have told me. . . ."

The other diners were most interested. Charles did not even wince. He asked intelligent questions about the brothel which Mrs. Trevelyan and Loveday were to run in Bucharest,

and suggested one or two items that she might do well to put into the prospectus.

What was the matter with Charles? Loveday found his behaviour uncanny. Surely, she could not have lost her old power of infuriating him, with everything else that she had lost?

Her attention was diverted by the sight of *homard thermidor* being carried to another party of diners.

"I'd forgotten there was such a thing: I simply must have it. I shouldn't be able to doddle round with a tame dish of eggs while there's hot lobster to be snatched from the mouths of others. I simply couldn't. How I'm upsetting your nice thoughtful dinner, Charles. But there's something so sumptuous, so—so Poi about *homard thermidor*, all dripping with mussels. . . . Makes me feel as if I were feasting with the Splendid Borgeous Gorgers! Your *sole véronique* is only fit for an *ingénue*, for a man's pretty young fiancée. Nobody in their senses could suppose me that," she added, dangerously, with a gleam and flash at Charles, across the table.

"Do you think you can stand fish again, after the caviare?" asked Charles, not impatiently, nor even indulging himself in martyred patience.

"What does it matter?" demanded Loveday, admirable in her unreason. "After all, it isn't as though caviare were the spawn of the lobster, is it? I mean, that would be rather incestuous, to eat both—if you look on eating as a sort of wedding. Charles, do tell them to hurry up. Aren't they being too frightfully slow?"

When they came to the pheasant, Loveday observed graciously: "I really do like this partridge!" She had gulped down 1906 Pouilly-sur-Loire, with the fish course, as though its flowerlike fragrance and dreamy after-taste were no more to her than fizzy lemonade. But before the very special Château Haut Brion 1900 was poured into her glass, she suddenly begged for champagne: "*My* mother *says—I* never *should* . . . ask for something that hasn't been put in front of me. But still,—You know what I am, by now!"

Charles assented gravely. He had paid corkage fee at the restaurant, because this most special vintage of Haut Brion had been brought in by himself, a concession from the private cellar of his own wine-merchant, who had only a very few bottles left. He would not be so discourteous to Loveday as to let her drink champagne while he tacitly reproved her taste by drinking Bordeaux himself, so he drank champagne too, and the Haut Brion was neglected. And Loveday—apparently —did not even notice what he drank.

. . . As though there were any trifle so minute about Charles that she would not have noticed it! She considered him, her eyes aslant, wondering if there were limits to his forbearance; and if so, whether her wits could devise a lay sufficiency outrageous to pass those limits, and tumble them down? She was lost if, leaving Charles, she always had to remember him like this. Lost, lost! . . . As though her future was not hell enough without so good a memory of Charles! The dreary, dingy future, trailing about forlornly with Mummy. . . . "Mother and daughter!—English—Charming people!"

—Terrified of her captivity to Charles, Loveday determined to end it now, by a swift moral suicide. . . . She had drunk champagne until her head felt like a swirl of bubbles. They were almost alone in the restaurant; all the other clients, except some at the far end, had already dined and left.

—"By the way, Charles, will Mummy have to pay you for what you did today? She will, won't she? How much?"

"Messrs. Gavin, Gray & Gavin arranged my fee for thirty guineas," replied Charles. He recognized, by long and painful initiation, Loveday's curious process of self-destruction, and was not in the least disturbed by it. "About thirty guineas, Debonair."

Loveday set her teeth. "Why do you call me that? Sort of mad name!"

"Yes," he agreed. "It suits you."

"Charles, darling-angel Charles, considering how indecently rich you are, and how gloomily poor we're going to

be, and considering that we all lost the case together, and you'd much rather not have been mixed up in it all, wouldn't it be making rather a gesture—I hate to prompt your gestures!—if you just slipped *me* the money Mummy's got to give you? Then"—innocently—"we shall be all square, won't we?"

Most genially he acquiesced. He pulled out his fountain-pen, and a blank cheque from his pocket-book. "Thirty-one pounds, ten shillings!" and handed it across to Loveday, who boldly took it, and put it in her bag, with her prettiest thanks—and with a fierce and silent vow to destroy it the instant she got away from him.

"Oh, and Charles, you won't go about saying you've been coerced into this, will you? I mean, you do know quite well what you're doing?"

He did not reply with any teasing reference to undue influence, for he guessed that Loveday was still smarting and tender from the day's legal proceedings. He just said, simply: "Oh, yes, I know what I'm doing. I'm quite sane now, Loveday."

"Were you ever not sane?"

"Yes," honestly, but with an effort. But he felt he owed this much effort to Loveday, for her two weeks in the flat, shut in with the muffled places of his obsession. "Yes. I wasn't sane—about Petal."

She flushed hotly, forgetting for a moment to be tiresome, flippant, and antagonistic. . . .

"I've been thinking this about you, Loveday—"

"Ah! Loveday's pleased and interested! Go on! You won't mind, will you, if, when you wander on to other topics, I firmly haul you back again? It's so disappointing when people start and don't go on for long, when it's about me! Charles dear, when it's about me, I say that I don't want flattery, only enlightenment. And I mean it just the other way round. One always does." She felt easier now; could rattle along without dropping into confusion. "Or is there a snag in this, and are you going to lecture me again?"

"*Have* I always lectured you? How heavy of me, and how ridiculous and insufferable! This is what I've found out about life, through you, Loveday; it condenses like a copybook maxim: 'Wisdom—is the Reward—of Honesty!'"—Then he laughed aloud at her expression of ingenuous disgust. "Well—yes. Priggish. But it's true. Because you are honest about people and about yourself and your effect on people, things come to you straight, and so you grow wise. You don't have to bring everything round by a terrific détour, to make it finally fetch up in the right light, and wholly to your credit. Wisdom *is* the reward of honesty!"

"It sounds awfully queer and stilted," said Loveday, seeing that Charles, who had sworn, on their drive to Marlborough, never to worship again, was now dusting his knees preparatory to kneeling in front of a new altar called Honesty. ("But somehow it matters less when the altar's me!") "Awfully queer. Still, as a discovery, it won't add up and make gunpowder, will it? Now, if I added up all that *I* know about Loveday Trevelyan—" she held out her hand. "—give me a pencil, and some more champagne. This needs courage." He filled up her glass. She wrote on the stiff glossy surface of the table-cloth: "Loveday Trevelyan." Then she put three exclamation marks, and a row of crosses. "That's to begin with."

"What are the crosses?" Charles asked, leaning over, very interested. So was the head waiter, hovering behind them.

"The crosses are for kisses to me, because, whatever I write down, I'm very, very precious to me, and I shall probably need encouragement before I've finished."

"Go on, Debonair!"

Loveday scribbled again: "She asked for cheques. She accepts silver coats. She elopes with strange men—two: Fritzie and Tim. She drinks too much champagne, and falls asleep—quite comfortably—in other strange men's arms. . . . But he was a good one, Charles. You'd like Stefan. Oh hell! What a list! What else? She's untidy, unpunctual, inconsiderate, hard, flippant, disgraceful.. She makes up her face, cheeks her mother, won't work, parasite, idler—I'm coming to the end of

the table-cloth, Charles!—ungrateful, unreliable, capricious, and—and flamboyant in her attire."

"Good!" said Charles.

Loveday pressed her pencil down on to the cloth, drew a black line under the sum of her sins, and added them all up to the one word "hopeless." . . . "Hopeless"—she scrawled it and flung down the pencil. "Hopeless, Charles!" She raised her eyelids. . . .

And saw him looking at her as though he loved her.

"Will you marry me, Loveday?"

. . . But, said in this voice, it sounded as though he had never spoken the words to her before.

. . . And simultaneously a fiery embarrassment descended upon the pair of them; a mute and scarlet agony, as though they were a boy and girl who had hardly spoken together, only met and gazed and been thrilled—as though they were not Charles and Loveday, but the shyest boy and girl. Loveday's cheeks flamed and flamed. Charles could not think of one word to say.

CHAPTER IX

"GAY GO UP"

LATER in the evening, when once again they had been able to pull a thin gauze of civilization over the glory underneath, Loveday remarked: "Mummy will have to live with us."

She did not suppose the news would be welcome to Charles, but she had no fear now that melodrama could happen; that sacrifice and misunderstanding could once more turn her off enchanted ground. The good which had come to her was real, beyond all question. Charles' behaviour tonight had answered the test of all her defiant raids upon it.

Of course Mummy would have to live with them. She had promised. She was responsible for Mummy, and for her own promises.

. . . "Charles!" she pleaded.

"I heard you, Debonair. I'm taking it in, slowly. You want your mother to live with us?"

"No, I don't want her to, a bit. She's a terribly difficult one, but she can't be left alone without me. I've promised her. I left her all cosy and curled up inside the promise, like a babe in a bassinet."

"What would happen," tentatively, from Charles; "—I'm only trying this on, Loveday!—but what would happen if I said: 'Choose between your mother and me!'

"Darling-angel Charles. Nothing at all would happen. I'd just *not* choose. Did you suppose I'd renounce my rich lover, all noble, and go off with Mummy in a nun's costume and a snow-storm to a brothel in Bucharest? Sacrifice isn't my lay!"

"You renounced your rich lover the other night, didn't you?" he dared to remind her, softly.

But he had not been the lover, then. As though she could

have endured the sorrow of *not* sacrificing him, of marrying him, when he had flung his offer at her, contemptuous of whether she picked it up! The other night had been so different from—tonight.

. . . "But about Mummy, Charles, You didn't see her at her best today!" Loyally she strove to give him a vision of those moments, rare but true, when she herself had adored Mummy and respected her. He had already heard Loveday describe, in court, the scene of Augusta Penrhu's death; and how Laura Trevelyan had nursed her invalid cousin untiringly and without complaint, for six weary weeks. And then, at the end, had calmly protected her from being worried over the Will; though had she but sanctioned a little cruelty then, without even aiding in it, she might have been richer by an uncontested eight hundred a year. . . .

"—She's marvellously brave, Charles. And sometimes I can get her to do all sorts of extravagant quee things with me, and we rock off together, roistering ones! Mummy, when she drops her Only-Daughter lay, can be more amusing than you'd ever think. And you've no idea, Charles, how altogether sweet and bosomy she can be when I'm right up against it, and in the most frightful hat. And even if my scrapes had even been worse—bastards and hellish things of that sort!—if they had been really awfuller than I can imagine them now, I still know, I absolutely *know*, that Mummy would stand by me!"—She halted to reflect on that time when she had confessed to Mummy the dark mazes of her wanderings through the nether-world, and Mummy had failed her. . . . "Yes, but that was because I left her nothing to do about it. I'd already climbed out of it then, all by myself, or by luck, or by Judith; somehow, anyway! First I overwhelmed Mummy, and then I gave her nothing to do. If I had asked her to help me in any of the mess, she'd have been there all right; she'd have come trumpeting forward like a maternal elephant, waving her trunk and charging my enemies. Darling Lamb-Bird! But in my fool way I just deposited it—slam! dump! Oh, I do understand that Mummy wasn't up to that!"

. . . But she said nothing of this to Charles. Some day she would tell him, perhaps. Not now. There was no need. Instead, on an impulse, she vividly sketched for him the pendent scene which had occurred this afternoon, when her mother had collapsed after the disappointment of losing her case; and down there, at the bottom of all illusion, had seen herself face to face. . . . "Just another old woman, not very interesting, and with nothing much to talk about. Why should you stop with me now? I've always bullied you." . . .

Charles looked thoughtful, at Loveday's quotation.

You cannot hope to stand square with your crimes, of course, by simply admitting them; but, at least, the capacity to admit them, without gloss or ensuing credit, showed him Loveday's mother in acute contrast with his own. . . . And another echo rippled through his mind, of Petal-in-the-Right. ". . . As though I cared about the foolish feeble verandah! But it seemed important to him. . . ."

Mrs. Trevelyan did not fail too badly in the comparison. A cross dumpy old woman in black, not pretty, not well-produced nor marvellously surrounded, not unfailingly tactful, nor too wonderful; but just capable, *in extremis*, of one honest gesture. Charles, for a brief second, envied Loveday her mother. Already, and she had divined it, he was on his knees before the altar of Honesty. "But Petal wouldn't have lost the case today." . . .

He smiled at Loveday, and she thought that the dark shadow which had lain for a moment across his brow and eyes had been her imagination.

"It seems hardly worth while to be married, Debonair. We shall have to get divorced so soon afterwards; almost simultaneously if your mother's going to live with us. We're high-strung, high-spirited young things, you know, and marriage isn't an easy adventure for us or for anybody."

"I know. I can't help it. We'll have to swallow Mummy. I simply won't go home to her tonight and say: 'Lamb-Bird, I'm going to be married, and leave you alone, almost at once!' I can be a cad, but not such a cad as that. I *am*, damn it, her

only daughter. Oh hell! I wish she had eleven, and a few sons as well. It's the duty of all parents to have large families."

"You've been a good son to your mother, Loveday."

Her eyes were tender as she laughed back: "I'll be a good husband to you, Charles."

"No, by God, you won't. You'll be a wife and a mother, Debonair; you're conventional at rock bottom, in spite of all this pirate business that we've heard so much about."

"That we've quarrelled so much about," Loveday gently corrected him.

"Yes, that we've quarrelled so much about. . . ." His glance flickered amusedly over the silver coat. "Did you think that *that* was enough to put me off? But don't worry, Loveday; if it must be, your mother shall live with us. I'll be as decent as I can, and make her feel she's wanted. All the same, the scheme will prove fatal. If not before, when you have a daughter of your own."

Loveday agreed. "Yes, darling Mummy! What fun she'll have, watching her only daughter's only daughter being wicked and ungrateful and rebellious. . . . Being—hopeless! Charles, I've spoilt the table-cloth, or haven't I? Will it wash off, do you think? Or will people who dine here for as long as the restaurant lasts, will they have to read, very, very faintly, the long, immortal list of my faults? Perhaps you'd better pay for it, and take it home in a parcel, and give it to me as sort of a sentimental wedding-present, with tears in your eyes. And I shall cry, too, not because I'm so touched, but because I expect something much more expensive!"

Loveday, as radiant as though she had inherited the earth and all the spring flowers that grow on it, rushed breathlessly into her mother's bedroom.

"Darling Mummy! Lamb-Bird, are you awake? Did I wake you? Did you hear us drive up, about twenty minutes ago? Mummy, you're going to live with us. I'm telling you that first, so that the rest shall burst on you without a flaw. Because you *are* going to live with us, and not be alone a bit, so don't

worry. And I shall be just as fond of you as ever I was, and so will Charles—" which was accurately true. "—And oh, Mummy, I'm going to marry him, and that's the part that really matters, and ought to have come first, if I hadn't been afraid of upsetting you before I could cram the rest in. Because I haven't forgotten my promise. And we'd simply hate to live without you, just Charles and I alone."

Laura Trevelyan sat up in bed.

She took Loveday in her arms and kissed her.

Then she said: "But *of course,* darling, I'm not going to live with you. I wouldn't dream of it. It's quite, quite different when you're going to be married. Indeed, I don't want to live with you. Young married couples should be left to themselves. There's no greater mistake than having a mother-in-law in the house."

A completely incredulous Loveday stood and gazed at her, stupefied.

"But, Mummy—"

"Now, my darling, you're not to argue. Mummy knows best. I shall be perfectly happy, and independent, and with plenty to do. I'm not helpless, I hope! Dear me, no. Sometimes I can come and stay with you; but living with you—it wouldn't work. It never does. Darling, I'm so happy about you. . . ."

"But Mummy—you said—you always said—you said this evening that you dreaded living alone."

Laura Trevelyan repeated, firmly: "It's quite different, leaving me, if you're going to be married."

SHE could not drop off to sleep again that night, after Loveday had left her. But it did not matter. Sleep was a waste of time when there was no need for oblivion, when there was so much treasure to draw through her mind, slowly fingering it, like a string of pearls.

She lay awake in the dark, smiling a little. . . .

So her daughter was to be married; and would have daughters of her own, one day. Then she would understand how mothers felt; then they would cease to be enemies . . .

though Laura did not really divulge, even to the dark around her, that they had ever been enemies. But now life was going to roll on, and in the natural way, like the passing of the seasons. Laura herself, who had once and long ago been a daughter, became a mother; Loveday, her daughter, would be a mother, too. Blossom and fruit . . . seed and blossom. And while tenderly pitying Loveday for all that she must inevitably suffer, yet it was sweet to know that the girl would not escape, now, free and lithe and careless. She would have to suffer, and understand. . . . And then she and Laura could be friends, honest friends, mother and mother. The real loneliness was over.

Dreamy satisfaction . . . with a savage stripe in it.

Consciously, Mrs. Trevelyan thought: "A daughter married. . . . And well married, too; such a good match! I liked that young man from the very beginning. I always say that a boy who is good to his mother will be good to his wife. Rather too serious—I hope there's nothing on his mind—I must talk to him, privately, tomorrow. If there's been any—any entanglement—naturally he wouldn't want Loveday to hear of it. She'll brighten him very much. . . . A ray of sunshine—I always said that Loveday was like a ray of sunshine. Yes, yes. . . . I must tell everyone tomorrow . . . write to Katie Strada. She will be pleased. . . . Poor Marietta, such a big clumsy girl! After all, being good at tennis isn't enough to get you a husband!"

Then again, up-welling from below the surface, not quite clearly revealed, even to herself: No shame in telling Katie Strada, and the whole world, of a daughter who was going to live apart from her mother, if she were going to be married. Oh, a bitter humiliation if for any other reason!—a mother too cross to live with, for instance, or too dull, or too old. . . . But—to be married! Why, it was nature. It was the old way—the good old way. . . .

She did not mind being alone, in the future; she had only minded, wildly and in a panic of agony, the picture of herself *left* alone; a forlorn picture of herself, with others pitying her.

Back again to those pleasant easy plans. . . . "Dear me, I shall quite enjoy having a little flat, and being able to travel when I want to. Loveday was so untidy; strewed her things about so! With Loveday settled, I can manage, on my tiny income; let me see . . . yes, yes. . . . Cesarina will be glad to come to me permanently; and when I travel, she can maid me. Or could I leave her in the flat?

. . . "So they wanted me to live with them? Darling Loveday! Sweet of them both! But they don't realize how much a third is in the way. They think that marriage is all love and rainbows; but it's a very difficult adventure. It's lucky for them that I've got the sense and experience to realize it. . . . The child is young, very young. Rather a baby, even for twenty-one. Perhaps she's a little bit afraid at the thought of being a wife, and the mistress of a big house! . . . Responsibilities. . . . Poor Loveday! . . . And she thought that if I were with her to teach her a little bit . . . But no, no. Certainly not. It would never answer. Loveday must learn to do without her mother!"

A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

This book is composed on the Linotype in Bodoni, so-called after its designer, Giambattista Bodoni (1740–1813) a celebrated Italian scholar and printer. Characteristics of the type that will be noted are the square serifs without fillet and the marked contrast between the light and heavy strokes.

SET UP, ELECTROTYPED,
PRINTED AND BOUND
IN IMPORTED SUNFAST CLOTH
BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC.,
BINGHAMTON, N. Y.
PAPER MADE BY W. C. HAMILTON & SONS,
MIQUON, PA.